BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY on JAGUAR ISLAND

ROY ROCKWOOD

Merry Xmas
Claude
from Violet 1929

BOMBA DROPPED FLAT ON THE GROUND

BOMBA
THE JUNGLE BOY ON JAGUAR ISLAND

OR

Adrift on the River of Mystery

BY

ROY ROCKWOOD

AUTHOR OF "BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY," "THROUGH THE AIR TO THE NORTH POLE," "ON A TORN-AWAY WORLD," ETC.

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BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY ON JAGUAR ISLAND
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BOMBA
THE JUNGLE BOY
ON JAGUAR ISLAND

CHAPTER I

WHAT THE LIGHTNING REVEALED

BOMBA crouched beneath the shelter of an overhanging rock, straining his ears for a faint sound not born of the storm.

The rain was coming down in a pitiless torrent. The thunder battered against the surrounding hills and went off grumbling into the distance, to be swallowed up in louder detonations. Trees bent before the fury of the wind like a bow in the hands of an archer. Some of the smaller trunks, wrenched from their roots, fell with a thud to the ground. Castanha nuts, like pebbles from the sling shot of a giant, pelted the jungle in a deadly hail. It was a devastating storm that for the time subdued all other forces of the jungle.

None but the ears of the boy of the jungle could have detected that faint sound through the clamor of the tempest. None but the eyes of Bomba

could have seen that something that stood out like a black blot against the vivid background of the lightning.

Bomba crouched lower beneath the jutting rock and one hand slipped to the belt at his waist, firmly gripping the handle of his razor-edged knife. Whether man, beast or reptile threatened, Bomba was not to be caught off his guard.

A crash of thunder that seemed to rip the very heavens asunder, a flash of lightning like a jagged finger of fire searing the sky, and again Bomba saw that blot, but this time more distinctly.

With a smothered exclamation, Bomba slipped into the narrow gully that ran behind the rock, a gully, now half filled with water but thickly fringed with bushes, concealing him from the eyes of his enemies.

For the flash of lightning had revealed no lurking jaguar, hungry for its prey. The foes of Bomba were of a far deadlier kind, deadlier even than the wicked anaconda with its folds of steel. For these were headhunters—bloodthirsty, cruel, cunning—bucks of the tribe of the dreaded chief, Nascanora.

The eyes of Bomba, keen as those of the big cats that stalked the jungle, had counted three of these in the brief space of the lightning flash. They stood like naked statues, each gripping a

spear, the eyes of each prodding the deeper shadows beneath the overhanging rock.

Rage was in the heart of the jungle boy, and fear; fear not for himself but for Cody Casson, his one white friend who had reared him from infancy; Cody Casson, now frail and wasted, who lay helpless, perhaps close to death, in the hut of Pipina, the squaw.

Bomba knew with a sure instinct the reason for the presence of the headhunters of Nascanora, now far from their tribal abode in the shadow of the Giant Cataract. They were once more on the trail of Casson; Casson whom Bomba loved. They would try to capture him, take him to their village and torture him, and then, when death had brought an end to his sufferings, place his head on Nascanora's wigwam.

The hand of Bomba clutched convulsively at the handle of his knife. He vowed to the gods of the thunder and the rain that he would protect his friend to the last gasp; that if Casson were to die, he, Bomba, would die with him, stretched across his body.

But it was too early yet to think of death. Too long had Bomba braved the perils of the jungle not to know the fleetness of his foot, the sureness of his eye, the strength of his muscles. Bomba had fought the braves of Nascanora's tribe before; had beaten and outwitted them. He

would fight them again, matching his strength against their strength, his brain against their brain. And he told himself that Bomba would win.

Stealthily as a shadow, still crouching low behind the bushes, Bomba crept along the gully, his ears strained for any sound that might indicate pursuit.

Had they seen him? Had his form beneath the shadow of the rock been as plain to them as theirs to him?

Bomba doubted this, for the rock was sheltered by the overhanging limbs of trees, while the Indians had stood up straight, clearly outlined against the tangled undergrowth of the jungle.

The advantage so far was Bomba's. But how long could he hope to retain it?

Bomba pushed against the wind almost as against a solid obstacle. It required all his strength to keep his feet. The lightning, that was now almost incessant, filled the forest with weird light, illuminating the tree branches and swaying vines in a fantastic tracery. Heavy ropes of creepers swung from the branches above the boy's head and wrapped themselves about him, impeding his progress.

With teeth gritted, Bomba fought the fury of the storm. It was terrible, but not so ruthless

and relentless as the enemy he was trying to leave behind.

An unusually vivid flash of lightning illumined a faint trail at Bomba's right. He would leave the gully here and strike homeward toward the cabin of Pipina, where Casson lay, all unknowing of the danger that threatened him. He had been on his way there when the storm had risen and forced him to seek shelter beneath the lee of the rock.

A tree fell with the sound of rending branches directly in front of him. The outflung boughs caught him, swept him backward; castanha nuts pelted about him, now just grazing him and again leaving painful bruises on his body.

He freed himself and struggled doggedly onward. It was not far to the hut of Pipina now, but, pursued by the demons of the storm and having to hack his way at times through the underbrush, each yard had to be fought for.

Then, suddenly, Bomba stopped.

His hand grasped tightly the hilt of his knife, his eyes narowed as they searched an especially heavy clump of bushes.

Another flash illumined the thicket and Bomba saw the ugly head of a jararaca, the rattlesnake of the South American jungle, upraised to strike.

As the world was again bathed in blackness the serpent sprang. At the same instant Bomba

dodged, his hand darted forward and caught the reptile by the neck. His fingers closed upon that slimy neck like a ring of steel. The snake writhed fearfully and threw its coils about Bomba's arm.

Had the lad's fingers relaxed the merest trifle, the fangs would have found their mark. But those fingers kept up their relentless pressure until the thrashing coils gradually grew limp.

To make assurance doubly sure, Bomba beat the reptile's head against a rock, then flung the hideous thing far from him into the bushes.

"The snake is quick," said the boy to himself, in justified pride, "but Bomba is quicker."

He plunged forward again, but in a moment stopped, listening intently. What was that?

Only the threshing of the rain, the roar of the wind?

No, it was different from either of these. It was the sound of one or several bodies pressing through the heavy undergrowth that in places grew higher than a man's head.

And it was not the body of a jaguar or a puma that was pushing through the thickets. Bomba was familiar enough with the habits of these creatures to know that on a night like this they would remain closely sheltered in their caves. None of them would brave the fury of the elements.

Nor was it the odor of animals that was borne

to him. Bomba's long residence in the jungle had developed his sense of smell so that it was almost as keen as that of the jaguar itself. His nostrils dilated now as he sniffed the air and caught the unmistakable scent of human kind.

He had thought that he had left his enemies behind. Now he knew that they were also in front. It was from that direction that the scent had come.

It was no small party with which he had to deal. Nascanora's braves were out in force. All Bomba's subtlety and force would be needed that night, if he were to keep his head on his shoulders. And Bomba valued that head highly.

He went forward now more slowly, more cautiously, pausing to look about him warily when the lightning illumined the jungle.

At one brilliant flash he dropped behind some bushes as though shot.

Not more than a dozen yards away three Indians were creeping toward him, spear points lowered, glinting evilly!

CHAPTER II

AT GRIPS WITH THE ENEMY

LIKE a flash Bomba leaped to his feet and plunged into the underbrush.

He was not a moment too soon! With a yell, the headhunters sprang toward the spot where he had been but a moment before.

Had Bomba been on a level plain, he could have laughed at his pursuers, for none of them matched him in fleetness of foot. But when it came to forcing his way through the heavy brush, they could move almost as quickly as himself, and the noise he made would be a sure guide to his pursuers.

Realizing this, Bomba adopted new tactics. With the litheness of a deer he rose in the air, and with a series of successive bounds rapidly increased the distance between him and the enemy. He hurdled the bushes in great leaps while his heavier foes were forcing their way through them.

At times he came to places where long creepers depended from the trees, and in order to rest his

legs he swung himself along by his arms from one to the other with incredible celerity.

Bomba's heart sang within him as the sounds of pursuit became fainter. But just as he was beginning to feel that he had escaped the most pressing danger a chorus of yells came from somewhere in front of him. These were answered by savage shouts in the rear.

To go on would be to throw himself into the hands of his foes. To retreat would be equally dangerous.

Turning to the nearest tree, Bomba shinned up it with the agility of a monkey and sought refuge in the thick foliage that hid him from sight, while yet permitting him to see what might be going on below.

What was in that tree he did not know. Perhaps a boa constrictor wound about one of the branches. But he must take his chance between possible death there and the almost certain death that threatened him on the ground beneath.

He had scarcely ensconced himself, panting, in the fork of two great branches before a dozen or more Indians were under his refuge, jabbering with rage and disappointment. They had thought they had their prey encircled and that all they had to do was to close in upon it. Now it had vanished as though into thin air.

With their spears and machetes they viciously

beat the brushwood to right and left, thrusting their weapons into every thicket, their anger growing as their efforts remained fruitless.

At last they paused and grouped themselves together for consultation. Bomba's eyes strained through the darkness, trying to ascertain their number. His ears sought also to get what they were saying. Had it not been for the noise of the tempest, he might have succeeded in this, for he was familiar with most of the dialects of the jungle dwellers. But all he could hear was a low growl that conveyed to him no meaning.

Then the sound of voices died away and the only noise was that of the storm. The black mass of figures had dissolved. Bomba seemed to be alone.

Had the headhunters passed on? Had they been warned perhaps of some danger that menaced them as well as the fugitive?

For a moment the heart of the jungle lad leaped with hope. Then his sensitive ear caught a rustling that he knew was not occasioned by the wind.

No, they had not gone. Some, perhaps, but not all.

A lightning flash more dazzling than any that had gone before rent the darkness of the jungle, flooding it with weird, unearthly light. In that

flash Bomba caught sight of several Indians crouched in the vicinity of the tree.

There came a rending, splintering crash that nearly shattered his ear drums, a detonation that seemed to shake the earth.

A giant tree near by, struck to the heart by the bolt, toppled and crashed toward the earth. The Indians yelled and tried to flee. A blood-curdling scream rang through the jungle as the tree trunk thudded to the ground.

Bomba sensed what had happened. There was only one meaning to that scream.

"The storm does Bomba's work better than he can do it himself," muttered the lad.

If he had had any doubt that death had occurred, another flash showed that he had made no mistake. The great tree in falling had caught one of the Indians beneath it, crushing the life from his body instantly. The other savages were not visible, and Bomba rightly guessed that they would believe the spot to be under a curse and would shun it as they would the plague.

"They will not come back to-night," reasoned the jungle lad, "and to-morrow will be too late, for Bomba will not be here."

With Bomba, to think was to act. Reaching out, he clutched a handful of creepers and slid to the ground. He paused a moment to get his direction and then vanished into the underbrush.

There was no sign of his foes, and Bomba blessed that lightning stroke that had sent them in panic flight. Not for the next ten minutes did anything happen to give him alarm.

Then, without warning, he was struck from behind and fell to the ground. The sound of a guttural voice was in his ears and sinewy fingers wound themselves about his throat.

While the jungle boy struggles desperately to loose that strangling hold, it may be well, for the benefit of those who have not read the preceding volumes of this series, to tell who Bomba was and what had been his adventures up to the time this story opens.

Bomba could never remember a time when he had not lived in the jungle. His only companion and guardian was Cody Casson, an aged naturalist, who had withdrawn from civilization and the life of white people to settle in one of the remotest recesses of the Amazonian jungle. Whether he was related to him, Bomba did not know and had never wondered. He would not have known the meaning of relative. He only knew that he loved Casson and that Casson loved him, although the latter seldom demonstrated any affection in words, spending days at a time in moody abstraction.

The old man's state had grown worse after a certain memorable day when he had fired a gun

at an anaconda which was threatening to attack Bomba and the weapon had burst in his hands. The reptile was wounded by the flying missiles and retreated, but Casson had received a serious injury to his head. Bomba nursed him back to some degree of physical health, but Casson from that time on was half-demented, and the care of providing for the two had fallen on the lad's shoulders.

For such youthful shoulders it was a heavy burden, but it helped to develop the lad into a wonder of strength and daring. Dangers of all kinds surrounded him, wild beasts and reptiles with which the jungle swarmed, and only quick wit and dauntless courage could preserve his life. But necessity is a hard taskmaster, and under its spur Bomba learned all the craft of the jungle. Keen of eye, swift of foot, supple of muscle, and strong of heart, he matched himself against his foes and so far had come out the victor. He was now about fourteen years old, but few grown men had his strength and resources.

Of the outside world he knew nothing. All his life was circumscribed by the jungle. Casson had started to give him a smattering of learning, but the explosion of the rifle had brought this to an abrupt stop.

So Bomba roamed the jungle like a young faun at the beginning of the world. His face was as

bronzed as that of an Indian from constant exposure to sun and storm. But there was undeniable proof in his features, in his aquiline nose, his firm jaw, his brown hair and eyes, that he was of white blood. He wore the native tunic, or mendiyeh, and a puma skin was slung across his breast—that of Geluk the puma that he had come across and killed when it was trying to slay the friendly parrots, Kiki and Woowoo. Beneath his bare arms and legs powerful muscles glided and rippled. Homemade sandals encased his feet.

His weapons consisted of a bow and arrows, and he wore at his belt a machete, or two-edged knife, fully a foot in length, a fearful blade when it came to hand-to-hand fighting. In addition he had a five-chambered revolver, the only firearm of which he was possessed, and which had been given to him by two white rubber hunters after he had rendered them a signal service.

Despite its perils, he loved the life of the jungle, and but for one thing would have been reasonably happy. That thing was the consciousness of his white blood. It tugged at his heart, and while it gave him pride, it also tormented him. The call of the blood was strong within him. He knew that, somehow, he was out of place. Something was always calling him to go elsewhere, beckoning him on to new horizons, telling him that he belonged to the white people.

He had a great yearning to know of his parentage. He had not the slightest memory of his father or mother. Again and again he had questioned Casson on this point, but the old man's memory always failed him at the very moment of revelation. In these efforts to recall the past Casson had frequently muttered the words "Bartow" and "Laura," and Bomba had inferred that the names were those of his father and mother. But the further knowledge he craved was denied him.

How Bomba saved the camp of Gillis and Dorn, rubber hunters, from a night attack by jaguars—how he trapped the deadly cooanaradi, the most dreaded serpent of the South American wilds, when it pursued him; his adventures with alligators and anacondas; the besieging of his cabin by the headhunters; how his friends of the forest came to his aid when he was fearfully beset; all this is narrated in the first volumes of this series, entitled: "Bomba, the Jungle Boy; or, The Old Naturalist's Secret."

Later on, Casson told Bomba that, though he himself could not remember the facts about the lad's parentage, the latter could get that information from Jojasta, the medicine man of the Moving Mountain. Bomba, therefore, after providing for Casson's safety while he should be gone, set out to see Jojasta. From the very out-

set his path was beset with perils. Flood and earthquake, man and beast sought his life. He was instrumental in delivering from the hands of the savages a Mrs. Parkhurst and her son, Frank, and his association with the two deepened his desire to know more of that white civilization with which they were so familiar. He was hurled into a subterranean cavern, escaped by a hair's breadth and finally reached Jojasta and the Moving Mountain.

There disappointment awaited him; but he was told that if he could find Sobrinini, the witch who dwelt near the Giant Cataract, she might give him the knowledge for which his soul longed.

Baffled for a time but not disheartened, Bomba resolved to search out Sobrinini, though warned that great peril would attend the attempt. How true that warning was he soon had reason to learn. He fell into the power of Nascanora and was doomed by him to torture and death. How his quick wit saved him; the terrible dangers to which his indomitable spirit refused to yield, and which he finally surmounted; how he found Sobrinini at last on her island of snakes and brought her back with him, only to be tantalized with imperfect revelations that made it still necessary to hunt out Japazy on Jaguar Island is told in the preceding volume of this series, entitled,

"Bomba, the Jungle Boy, at the Giant Cataract; or, Chief Nascanora and His Captives."

And now to return to Bomba as he writhed and struggled to shake himself free from that terrible grip on his throat!

He knew that he was fighting for his life.

What was it that had waited for him with the stealth of the panther to leap upon him as he passed?

That one of the headhunters of the tribe of Nascanora had him in his grip, Bomba knew at the first touch of those fingers of steel about his throat.

Few could break the grip of the jungle Indian. Only those bred as Bomba had been among the very wild beasts of that tangled region could have hoped to free himself of that strangle hold.

With a tremendous heave of his powerful young shoulders Bomba flung himself upon his back, the Indian half over him. With frantic fingers the lad tore at that clutch about his throat.

Above, the thunder rumbled dourly. Dim flashes of sheet lightning served to deepen by contrast the darkness that enveloped the antagonists.

Strain as he would the lad could not force that hold to break. His head was reeling, his brain confused and black spots danced before his glazing eyes.

A flash of lightning brighter than the rest showed him the Indian, on whose face was an expression of fiendish gloating.

That look was a spur to Bomba's failing senses. He thought of Casson, left defenseless with Bomba dead, and by a mighty effort raised himself and drove his knee with all his strength into the flesh beneath the ribs of his antagonist.

The blow was a surprise to the Indian, who counted his adversary as already beaten. He grunted with dismay and pain. For the fraction of an instant his grip relaxed, and in that instant Bomba had burst the iron ring about his throat and was on his feet.

With a bellow of rage the savage also sprang upright, whipping out a short knife from his belt.

But quick as he was, Bomba was quicker. He saw the gleam of the Indian's steel, drew his own machete and with one stroke sent his enemy's weapon whizzing off into the underbrush.

Like a panther, the Indian sprang upon the white boy, and before Bomba could strike home with the machete had seized upon the lad's hand, striving to bend it backward and possess himself of the machete.

But if the Indian was strong, so was Bomba. He was fighting for two lives, his own and Casson's, and, moreover, one of his fierce rages was

upon him; one of those wild bursts of fury that for the moment gave him the strength of the jaguar, the wile of the fox, the quickness of the snake.

Bomba was all these in one now, as he fought with the Indian, straining backward and forward, resisting the pressure upon his knife arm, striving with all the power in him to drive downward the shining point of his machete, to sink it to the hilt in his enemy's flesh.

For some minutes the fierce struggle went on. Then, with a sudden twist, Bomba broke the Indian's hold, leaped backward several feet, and threw his machete.

It would have found its mark had not the savage fallen forward with the sudden releasing of Bomba's pressure. The knife grazed his head. Thrown off his balance, the savage tried to recover himself. But the slime of mud and leaves made treacherous footing and the Indian plunged headlong.

Bomba was upon him with the swiftness of a jaguar!

CHAPTER III

THE BLAZING CABIN

At such close quarters Bomba could not use his bow, and he dared not fire the revolver lest it attract the attention of lurking foes.

Rising into the air, he came down with both feet on his enemy's head. Then he stamped the head into the mud and ooze till the savage lay still.

Whether the man breathed or not, Bomba did not stop to inquire. It was enough that he had been put out of action. The noise of the struggle, muffled as it had been, might already be drawing others to the scene. Bomba must act swiftly, if he were to leave the spot alive.

One of his precious minutes he gave to the search for his machete. With its aid he might still win through to Casson at the hut of Pipina. By a stroke of good fortune he found the weapon where it had stuck in the trunk of a tree.

With a smothered cry of elation, Bomba leaped upon it and wrenched it from its hold.

Again and again that knife had saved his life, and it might do it again before the night was over.

Bomba's body was bruised, he was dead tired, but his spirit was unhurt. The thirst of battle was still in him. His blood was hot with it.

Twice to-night he had outwitted his enemies. Nascanora and his half-brother Tocarora would again realize that he, Bomba, was as slippery as the cooanaradi and as deadly.

He wasted no time. He set his feet in the direction of the cabin of Pipina, the squaw, and went stealthily yet swiftly through the jungle.

The storm had felled great trees across his path. Some of these he climbed over, while he took the smaller ones with a leap. Where the ground was impassable he swung himself along from creeper to creeper and branch to branch. No inhabitant of the jungle save the monkeys were as skilled in this method of progress as Bomba, and he made his way with amazing celerity. Never had that accomplishment stood him in better stead.

His eyes and ears were alert for the slightest sight or sound that might forebode danger. But this did not prevent his mind from being in a tumult of varied emotions.

His most anxious thought was of Casson, Casson alone in the jungle hut save for Pipina.

Again the headhunters sought the life of Casson. Again was Bomba hunted like the veriest wild beast.

Bitterness welled up in the heart of the lad against these savages, whom he had never injured except in self-defense. Why was he doomed to spend his life among these people so alien to him?

Bomba was white. All his yearnings were toward those of his own race.

Who were his parents? He thought of the picture of the beautiful woman that had hung in the little back room of Sobrinini's hut on the island of snakes. That face had stirred his heart as no other had ever done. Was the beautiful woman his mother?

Who was he? What had happened to his parents and why had he become at so early an age the sole companion of old Cody Casson?

He reviewed the strange behavior of the half-mad old woman, Sobrinini, she who had once been the operatic idol of Europe, she who had had kings at her feet. Why had she not finished the story of the man named Bartow, his wife, Laura, and the child they called Bonny?

Sobrinini had called him, Bomba, by the name of Bartow. She had thought in her poor twisted mind that Bomba was Bartow. Was it possible

that Bomba was the boy who had once been called Bonny?

Bomba heaved a heavy sigh. Questions, questions always, and no answers. Cody Casson had the key to the mystery. But poor Casson must first find the key to that closed door in his mind beyond which he could not go.

His mind in a whirl of unrest and longing, Bomba at last reached the river which he must cross to reach the hut of Pipina.

The storm had now entirely died away. Only the heavy dripping of moisture from the foliage betrayed its recent passage. The jungle was still again with an unearthly stillness. The slight swish made by Bomba as he swung himself from branch to branch was the only sound that broke the silence.

Suddenly he paused and hung motionless, arms and legs entwined about a bunch of creepers. His quick ear had caught a sound other than the dripping of water on the sodden earth.

It was a slight sound, but Bomba knew at once what had caused it. It was the faint dip of paddles in the water. The Indians were traveling upstream. The headhunters of Nascanora were on their way to the hut of Pipina to spread terror and death. Fortunate if death were all! Far worse would be the tortures of any captives who might be carried off alive to make a holiday

for the savages who had been left at home and who would revel in the screams of their victims.

Bomba had been carrying his machete between his teeth. Now he dropped lightly to the ground, and, with the double-edged knife held firmly in his grasp, ran swiftly toward the river.

Upon the banks of the stream he paused, listening. Still the dip, dip of paddles coming upstream. So faint and stealthy was the sound that it would have been inaudible to most ears other than those of Bomba.

The lad wasted not an instant, but slipped from the steep bank until he was waist deep in the sluggish water. The dense foliage of the jungle trees grew down to the very edge of the stream, flinging its rank growth out over the water.

Bomba had a canoe of his own concealed in the bushes some distance up the stream. Had there been time, he would have made for that, for he well knew the danger of making the river crossing by fording or swimming. The deadly alligator, or cayman, infested all the waters of the jungle, and any daring person that ventured to cross knew that he might pay for the venture with his life.

But time was everything to Bomba now. The headhunters were more to be feared than the cayman. The former were awake. The latter

might be asleep. At all costs, he must make the venture. He must make haste, if he were to save the life of Casson and that of Pipina.

Bomba had let himself go so gently into the water as scarcely to make a ripple, and he moved on noiselessly, wading where he could, but soon reaching the deeper channel where he had to swim. Then most of the time he swam under water lest his presence be declared to prying eyes. He was almost as much at home in the water as on land, and only at long intervals had to come to the surface for air.

But swiftly as he swam, the Indians could paddle more swiftly. And a terrible fear gripped the lad's heart as the sound of the paddles grew ever fainter in the distance.

They would reach the hut first. They would find it undefended and might attack at once. The worst might have happened before Bomba could reach the only place he called home.

What he would do when he got there he had not figured out. He would act as the occasion suggested. He would be but one against many; but he had been in that position more than once and yet won the victory.

He swam on swiftly until he was arrested by a sight that brought a growl of fury to his lips.

Turning a bend in the river, a light assailed Bomba's eyes, a fearful light, a light such as the

native of the jungle dreads above all others. It was a dull glow, brightening now and then to a vivid red as the flames swept skyward.

Bomba groaned and his teeth gritted against each other as he plunged madly forward. For he knew all too well what had caused the glare. The hut of Pipina was ablaze!

This was the work of Nascanora's bucks, their revenge upon a broken, demented old man who had never harmed any one in his life!

Was Casson in that blazing hut? Was poor Pipina, faithful friend, caught in that flaming inferno?

Scarcely daring to put these questions to himself, Bomba swam madly upstream, his one thought now of revenge. He was consumed by rage. His one desire was to feel the throat of Nascanora beneath his fingers.

The light was brighter now. The whole jungle was bathed in the fiendish glow.

Bomba turned toward the bank, but paused abruptly and trod water.

Between him and the shore, blocking his path, was a monster alligator!

CHAPTER IV

TERRIBLE JAWS

At sight of the cayman, Bomba's heart for a moment seemed to stop beating.

A wild hope that perhaps the brute was asleep and would not perceive his presence was quickly dispelled as the lad caught sight of two fiery eyes fixed upon him. Then the huge mouth opened, displaying the horrible array of teeth that, if they once closed on the lad, would bite him in half as easily as a pair of shears would snip a thread.

Despairingly, Bomba felt for his machete. He knew that it would avail little except perhaps to wound. It would simply help him to die fighting.

Then his heart leaped. His feet felt the river bed beneath them! He had reached the shallower part of the stream! Now he would have a footing, something that would give him a purchase and enable him to use his bow and arrows.

Quick as lightning, he unslung the bow from his shoulder and drew an arrow from its quiver. With one motion he fitted the arrow to the string and let fly.

The light from the fire gave him what he needed for his aim, and the arrow entered the eye of the monster and penetrated to the brain.

With a fearful bellow of rage and pain, the great brute leaped half out of the water and fell back, only to churn the water into a seething whirlpool. In its wild flounderings the end of its serrated tail caught Bomba on one of his legs and threw him farther out into the stream.

Bomba did not mind the blow, so full of exultation was he at the mortal wound he had inflicted on his enemy. But his elation changed to fear when he saw the scaly back of another alligator breaking the water. The brute had been attracted by the uproar created by its stricken comrade and was coming swiftly.

Luckily, the bank was not far away, and, putting all his power into his strokes, the boy swam as he had never swum before. He reached the shore not a moment too soon, for the hideous jaws snapped close behind him as he pulled himself up the bank.

The impulse was strong on Bomba to shoot another arrow at the reptile and send it to join its companion. But arrows were precious now, and all he had would perhaps be needed for human foes.

So he repressed the impulse and hurried along the bank until he had come near the fringe of

trees that bordered the clearing in which stood the hut. He could not yet see the hut itself. But to reach it he would have to make a dash across the clearing.

In the dark he could have eluded the eyes of his enemies, for no snake could move more silently. But now the open space was flooded with light. No figures were visible, but he knew that many eyes were watching from the surrounding woods.

Still he must chance it. He had faced death too often to let it daunt him now.

Summoning all his strength, he darted out into the open. His first few bounds carried him fifty feet. Then he dropped to the ground as a dozen arrows whizzed over his head.

It was upon this that Bomba had counted. He had timed his drop for just the instant that would allow the startled savages to aim and let fly.

He was up again on his feet, and before arrows could again be fitted to strings had gained another fifty feet. Again he repeated his stratagem, but this time not without scathe, for an arrow grazed his ankle.

"The arrow may be poisoned," he thought to himself, as he felt the twinge of pain. "If it is, this is the end of Bomba."

He reached the shelter of a tree and whirled behind it. On the side of the clearing he had

just left, one of the headhunters, keen after his prey, had come from behind his shelter.

Like lightning, Bomba fitted an arrow to his string. There was a twang, a hideous yell, and the savage threw up his hands and fell headlong.

"There will be one less to fight Bomba," muttered the lad. "They will find that Bomba can shoot."

If any had been inclined to follow the fallen Indian, they had hesitated when they had seen him drop, and Bomba had a moment's breathing space. He flew from behind the tree and, availing himself of what shelter he could find in his flight, came in sight of what had been his home.

His heart sank within him. The cabin was a mass of flames. It was impossible for life to be sustained in that furnace for a minute. If Casson and Pipina had been trapped there, they were already far beyond human help. They must be just what the hut itself would be in a few minutes more, a heap of smoldering ashes.

For a moment Bomba forgot everything save the agony that clutched at his heart. Then a sound brought him back to the danger that menaced him personally.

Out from the shelter of the trees, crouched almost double, their horrible faces illumined by the lurid light of the flames, came a number of the headhunters.

They approached in a semicircle, cutting off Bomba's retreat toward the front and on either side. Back of him was the blazing hut, the heat from which was already scorching his face and hands.

Bomba felt that he was trapped. His doom seemed sealed. He felt for the handle of the machete at his belt. He grasped his bow. He would not allow himself to be taken alive. Better instant death than the tortures of Nascanora. And he vowed that he would take more than one of his enemies with him.

He bent his bow, took quick aim and fired. A bronze-skinned buck clapped a hand to his breast, gave a frightful howl, and fell writhing in the dust.

But before Bomba could fit another arrow to his string there was a concerted rush and a dozen hands reached out to seize him.

Bomba leaped back quickly and drew his machete. His eyes blazed, his muscles tensed.

The Indians yelled and leaped forward.

Bang!

A sharp detonation clashed against their eardrums like a crash of thunder. The force of the explosion shook the earth and flung the natives to the ground.

Bomba found himself on his face, half-stunned,

bewildered. Mysterious missiles hurtled over his head, exploding in mid-air.

He raised himself cautiously to his knees and saw a sight that brought hope to his heart.

The Indians were in full retreat, and as they fled they looked over their shoulders at him fearfully, as though they blamed him for their discomfiture.

Bomba well knew the mind of the Indian. The cause of the explosion and the trembling of the earth were unknown to them. So they reasoned that it must be a spell thrown over them by Bomba, friend of the old witch doctor, Casson, to destroy them and save himself.

The Indians stopped in their mad flight at the edge of the jungle and looked back. One of them, more daring than the rest, raised his bow and took aim.

But before he could release the string one of the flying missiles struck the would-be slayer, hurling him to the ground.

This was too much. The savages turned terror-stricken and fled from that scene of mysterious death.

By this time Bomba had realized what must have caused the explosion. Their little store of powder, so carefully guarded by Casson and himself, had gone off when reached by the hot breath of the fire. The flying missiles were the last of

the cartridges belonging to his revolver, that wonderful gift of Gillis and Dorn, the white rubber hunters.

Bruised and shaken, Bomba staggered to his feet, hardly able to believe his good fortune.

But as he turned back toward the cabin a great wave of desolation flooded his heart.

There lay the cabin, now a heap of ashes. Were the ashes of Casson and Pipina also there? Had those faithful ones come there to their death?

With a sob Bomba threw himself on the ground and abandoned himself to uncontrolled grief.

This, however, was of short duration. A wild rage welled up in his heart, rage against the wicked Nascanora and his cruel tribe.

"They shall pay!" the lad cried, leaping to his feet. "For every drop of Casson's blood they shall pay! There will yet be wailing in the huts of Nascanora. It is I, Bomba, who swear it!"

He paused, head upflung, listening.

What was that sound?

CHAPTER V

HOW THE INDIANS CAME

BOMBA strained his ears and again heard the thing that had startled him. It was a faint cry, rising and falling like a wail somewhere in the bushes.

"Help!" came the voice, eerie as that of a banshee in the darkness. "Help, Bomba! Help!"

Into Bomba's heart sprang a great joy. This was the voice of Pipina, the squaw—the voice that he had never expected to hear again. And where Pipina was, must be Casson!

He was off like a deer in the direction from which the cry had come.

"Bomba hears you," he called softly. "Bomba is coming."

"Help!" came the feeble voice again. "Pipina is caught and cannot get loose. Come quickly."

Bomba wondered why he did not hear Casson's voice, if Casson still lived. But he said nothing and hurried on, hacking a passage through the undergrowth.

He came nearer and nearer to the wailing woman until, pushing aside a tangle of vines, he saw her. The moon, following close on the heels of the tropical storm, was now riding high in the heavens and shedding a soft luster over the jungle. By its light, Bomba caught sight of Pipina as she stood holding out helpless hands to him.

She had been caught in a thorn thicket that had cruelly scratched her hands and arms as she had struggled to free herself. Her wrinkled face was drawn with pain.

By the deft use of his machete Bomba cleared away the clutching branches and released her. The old squaw staggered dizzily, and the lad put this arms about her shoulders to support her.

"Casson!" muttered Bomba hoarsely. "Tell me, Pipina! Tell me quick! Where is Casson?"

The old woman drooped her head and stood there like a bowed statue of grief, but said nothing until Bomba, mad with anxiety, shook her gently by the shoulders.

"Do you hear, Pipina? Where is the good white man, Cody Casson, my friend?"

Then the old woman raised her hands above her head and gave vent to a wailing, desolate cry.

"Pipina no can tell. Casson her friend, too, good friend. He is gone."

Bomba's face darkened and again his heart contracted under the cold hand of anguish.

"Tell me, Pipina," he commanded. "Where has he gone? What has become of him?"

"We sit down and I will tell you," returned the squaw. "Pipina weak, sick—"

For answer, Bomba cleared a space and, taking the old woman, placed her as comfortably as he could with her back resting against a giant tree.

He sat down opposite her, his arms folded, his glance full upon her face.

"Now, Pipina, tell Bomba all," he urged.

The old woman looked about her and shuddered. She wrapped her skinny arms about her as though they were a garment and had power to ward off the chill of the night.

"Headhunters—they gone?" she asked fearfully.

"Gone," said Bomba tersely. "Where is Casson?"

"Bomba make them go away all by himself," continued the squaw admiringly. "Bomba great man some day—"

Bomba bent toward her.

"Do not talk foolishly, Pipina. Bomba not care about himself. Pipina tell about Casson."

The old woman gave her wailing cry and rocked herself back and forth drearily.

"We have bad time, Casson, Pipina," she said.

"We all alone in hut, wishing Bomba come. Storm come, but not Bomba. Thunder like roar of pumas, many pumas."

"Bomba caught in storm," explained the lad. "No could come till storm stopped."

"Pipina listen for sound of Bomba's feet," went on the squaw. "Pipina afraid. She think danger near. Wish Bomba would come quick."

She said this, leaning forward, in a quick, hissing whisper. Now she relaxed against the tree and stared gloomily into the heavy shadows of the jungle.

"Casson not too good," she muttered. "Pipina worry about Casson. Worry hard."

"What was wrong with Casson?" cried Bomba, exasperated beyond measure by the slowness with which Pipina got on with her story.

"He very sick," returned the squaw. "He not right." She touched her forehead significantly. "He walk back and forth, back and forth, and talk to himself. He say: 'Laura, Laura, dear sweet Laura. Must tell Bomba. Bartow and Laura and little boy—'"

Bomba caught the arm of the old woman in an eager grip.

"Go on," he commended. "What else did Casson say? Tell Bomba."

But Pipina shook her head.

"He not say more," she said. "Only those

words he say again and again. Then he stop, listen at door of hut, listen and then walk up and down, up and down."

"Go on," cried Bomba.

"Then we hear things. We think you come. We happy. We sing. We dance. But no, Bomba not come. It is the headhunters that come to try to kill Casson and Pipina—"

Bomba gave a low growl like that of an animal and ground his teeth together.

"They come." The voice of the old woman rose again in eerie wailing. "Casson, Pipina, we close door, push bolt, as Bomba tell us. We heap things against door. Casson he take down old gun, but it not work. He put fire stick through hole in hut. He think frighten bucks of Nascanora."

Bomba groaned as he saw the picture of old Cody Casson, brave to the last, defying death, his only weapon a "fire stick" that would not work.

"It happen quick," went on Pipina with a helpless shake of her head. "One, two, three—like that," with a snap of her bony fingers. "The headhunters come. They have heads, fresh heads, women, children heads, on string at waists. They want more heads, Casson's head, Pipina's head. They beat on door. They say: 'Open. No hurt. Nascanora friend of Casson.'"

Again came that growl as of an angry jaguar from the clenched teeth of Bomba.

"Forked tongues! Black hearts!" he snarled. The woman nodded.

"Casson no open door," she resumed. "He know Nascanora. He say things. Make big chief mad. He beat more hard on door. He shout: 'Casson witch doctor. He put a spell on sick people of our tribe. Nascanora burn Casson and hut of Casson with him.'"

A smoldering fire was in Bomba's eyes that boded no good to the chief of the headhunters.

"Then Nascanora bring fire to the hut of Pipina," went on the squaw. "His bucks come with heaps of vines and leaves. They wet and not burn at first. But after they burn, burn hot, and the hut of Pipina begin to burn too."

"But you got away, Pipina!" burst in Bomba eagerly. "You got away from the headhunters and the fire. That was good. But how did you do it? Tell Bomba. Do not make much words."

The old woman shrugged her shoulders and there was a touch of pride in her tone as she replied:

"Beneath the hut of Pipina there is a hole, and this hole it lead under the ground out into the jungle."

Bomba stared at her.

"A hole!" he exclaimed. "A passage! Why you not tell Bomba?"

The squaw smiled inscrutably.

"None know but Pipina."

Bomba was listening with the most intense interest and wonder.

"Go on," he cried, as Pipina paused.

"Pipina take up board in floor of hut," went on the old woman. "Then get down and crawl through hole. Casson come too. Long time to creep through hole. Then come to end. Out into jungle where wet and cool."

"Then Casson got out safely?" cried Bomba.

The squaw nodded, and Bomba gratefully took her old wrinkled hand in his.

"Pipina has saved the life of Casson," the lad said gravely. "For this Bomba thanks Pipina. He will never forget."

The old woman threw her hands above her head, rocking herself back and forth.

"Ayah, ayah!" she wailed. "Pipina save the life of Casson, but she lose him after. For when Pipina look around Casson is gone!"

CHAPTER VI

THROUGH THE JUNGLE

A PANG like the stab of a knife went through Bomba.

"What mean you, Pipina?" he cried. "Speak. Speak fast."

"We stand up from hole," the squaw explained. "We find us far in the jungle away from the headhunters of Nascanora. Yet Casson and Pipina still afraid."

"You hide?" asked Bomba.

The old woman nodded, looking about her fearfully.

"We go far, very far, into the jungle," she said. "We hide behind big rock. From there we see light from fire. Nascanora he think we are in hut. He think Casson and Pipina burn like tapir meat on the end of spit. But Pipina too smart for him. Pipina she fool the great chief Nascanora."

Her words ended in a chuckle. There was something so ghastly in mirth at a scene that had so many elements of tragedy that Bomba felt the

hair rise on his scalp, and he spoke sharply to Pipina.

"You have not told Bomba what happened to Casson. Do not laugh and say foolish words. Speak wise words and few words. Tell Bomba of Casson."

"Ayah!" wailed the squaw. "I look to see the clearing, the cabin. I look hard. I look long. Pipina's eyes were turned from Casson. Then I turn and see him. Then Pipina look again at cabin only as long as for a monkey to swing from tree to tree. Yet when Pipina turn again—Casson is gone."

"Gone!"

Bomba sprang wildly to his feet and looked about him.

"You do not know what way he went?" he asked.

"No, Pipina does not know," came sadly. "He was gone, and Pipina did not dare go from behind the rock for fear she be caught by the bucks of Nascanora."

"But why should Casson wander off?" asked Bomba, in bewilderment. "He was safer behind the rock in the company of Pipina."

The old woman sighed and touched her forehead again with her scrawny finger.

"He not right here," she reminded him. "He

not know what he do. Maybe he go to find Bomba."

"He cannot find his way anywhere," declared Bomba sadly. "He will be like a child in the jungle. He will be at the mercy of the big cats, of the anacondas, of the other creeping things that watch and spring upon their prey. Casson might as well have stayed in the hut of fire, for his death in the jungle is as sure."

Pipina wrung her hands and continued the rocking motion of her body.

"He is mad," she chanted in a singsong voice. "There is a strange power about him that will keep off evil. The gods will watch over him. The serpent will not strike him, the jaguar will not spring upon him. For they know that he is mad and fear him."

Though Bomba shook his head, the words of Pipina brought a little comfort to his heart. He knew that the savage beasts of the jungle, like the savage men of the jungle, had fear of all that was not sane and shunned it. Still, poor Cody Casson's feebleness of mind seemed but a doubtful protection, and Bomba's heart misgave him.

"When Pipina found that Casson was gone what did she do then?" he asked, turning to his companion.

"Pipina wait till fire go out and she think Indians go away," was the reply. "Then she

creep back toward the cabin. She hope Bomba come back and help her find Casson. Then the thorns catch Pipina and she stop. She call. Bomba come."

"Yes, Bomba came—too late," said the lad sorrowfully. "My heart is heavy for Casson. Except Pipina, Bomba has no other friend."

"There is the good chief, Hondura," suggested Pipina. "He will help Bomba."

"Yes, he will help," assented Bomba wearily. "Bomba will take Pipina to him where she may rest in the maloca of the good chief. There she will be safe from the headhunters of Nascanora. Then Bomba will find Casson."

But though Bomba spoke with courage, grief possessed him. In his heart he feared that certain death awaited the ill and feeble Casson in the jungle.

With a sigh, Bomba turned to Pipina and held out his hand to her.

"Come," he said. "Bomba and Pipina will go to the camp of Hondura. It is not safe to stay here longer."

The old woman shivered and protested.

"It is dark," she complained. "Wait till the sun rises in the sky and we shall go more quickly to the camp of the good chief Hondura."

"In this place there is danger," returned Bomba, in a low voice, looking uneasily about

him. "Even now the scouts of Nascanora may have returned to search the ashes of the cabin to make sure that Casson and Pipina are dead. Besides, they know that Bomba lives, and they will not sleep well at night until they know that he, too, is dead. Give Bomba your hand, Pipina. We must go."

Pipina obeyed without further protest. But she was trembling with age and the damp chill of the jungle night, and Bomba saw that their progress to the camp of Hondura and his people must be slow.

"Bomba will carry Pipina when the road is too rough," promised the lad. "But by the time the sun rises in the sky we must reach the maloca of Hondura or we are lost."

The old woman hobbled on beside him, whimpering.

"Bomba fears nothing, but Pipina is afraid," she wailed. "There are evil spirits abroad in the night. They will carry us off and bury us in the ygapo or feed us to the hungry jaguars."

"That would be better than to have the hands of Nascanora and his bucks fall upon us," replied Bomba grimly. "Besides, Pipina speaks words that are foolish. There are no evil spirits in the darkness. The night is kind, for it hides our going from our enemies."

Bomba spoke in a very low tone, scarcely above

a whisper. But Pipina interrupted him, holding up her hand.

"Listen!" she said. "What was that?"

For answer Bomba seized her by the shoulders and dragged her down beside him. Surrounded by the thick brush, they were well concealed from any one who did not pass too close. There was always a chance of being stumbled upon. But in that event Bomba's knife would flash with the quickness of the rattlesnake's spring, and its sting would be quite as deadly.

Bomba listened, muscles tensed, every sense alert. Neither he nor Pipina had been mistaken. They had heard a sound, the sharp crackling of a twig beneath a stealthy foot.

They heard no more for several seconds. Then, not twenty feet from them, the brushwood stirred, and from it they saw two figures emerge and stand faintly outlined against the darker shadows of the jungle.

Bomba's first thought was that perhaps the sound he heard had been caused by Casson. His heart leaped with hope and gladness. But that feeling was quickly dispelled when he recognized two of the headhunters of Nascanora.

They stood there conversing in a dialect which Bomba readily understood, as he did most other languages of the region.

"They are dead," said one of them. "The fire

has made ashes of their bones. The white witch doctor will no longer lay his spells on the people of the Giant Cataract."

Bomba rejoiced. They had not then found Casson.

"It is good," returned the other. "The squaws and the old men of the tribe will be glad when we tell them that the man who made bad magic is dead."

"But the boy still lives," returned the other. "Nascanora will not sleep well until he has his head upon his wigwam. Already this night the boy has beaten Toluro in fight. He stamped his head into the mud. And his arrows have carried death on their points."

"The demons help him," the other replied. "They come from the fire and strike down our men. He has the same magic as the old man with white hair. He is wiser and stronger than our medicine men."

A few more words, and the Indians passed on, their going scarcely disturbing a leaf or a twig.

"They pass like the shadows of all things evil," murmured Bomba to himself, as he cautiously rose again to his feet and prepared to resume his journey. "Come, Pipina."

They made fairly good progress, considering Pipina's age and weakness. There was no pausing to take their bearings, for Bomba was fami-

liar with the way that led to Hondura's village.

When the strength of the old squaw failed and she could go no farther, Bomba picked her up in his strong young arms and carried her with scarcely a lessening of his stride.

After a while they heard the sound of rushing water.

Bomba lowered Pipina to the ground and stood listening.

"The storm has filled the ygapo," he murmured. "It will be hard crossing. Listen, Pipina."

"I hear," wailed the squaw. "Bomba cannot ford the ygapo. He must swim, and that will be hard with an old woman on his back. Pipina cannot swim."

"There will be caymans in the ygapo," muttered Bomba thoughtfully. "Bomba cannot swim with Pipina and fight at the same time. Yet we must cross the ygapo if we are to be in the camp of the good chief before the sun comes up."

"Pipina cannot cross," whimpered the old woman. "She will be killed and Bomba too will be killed. Wait here till the darkness goes, and we will cross by the light of the sun. Bomba can make a raft and we will go on that."

"Our enemies are about us," returned Bomba, as he bent a frowning look upon the surrounding forest. "If we wait, they will find us and drag

us to the village of Nascanora. We cannot wait. We must go."

"The river roars," wailed the squaw, wringing her hands. "It waits for Bomba and Pipina like a jaguar hungry for its meat. It is death to cross."

"A little way from here there is a log across the water," said Bomba. "What better bridge do Bomba and Pipina want?"

"The log is slippery," moaned Pipina. "Bomba must go on. His feet are sure. But he cannot carry Pipina. He will fall. Bomba go alone. Leave Pipina behind."

Ignoring the woman's protests, Bomba caught her in his arms and bore her swiftly along the banks of the stream.

He came to the log that stretched from bank to bank of the ygapo, or swamp. At this point it had narrowed to the proportions of a moderately wide gully. Usually there was only a muddy ooze at its bottom.

But now the tropical rains had filled the gully, and a raging torrent roared between the banks.

Bomba's bridge would have been but a poor one at the best of times—a tree trunk cut down close to the bank in such a way as to fall across the gulch.

Even in the light of day, to cross its moss-grown, treacherous surface without slipping was

no easy matter. Yet Bomba had done it again and again, for he was as lithe and sure-footed as a mountain goat.

But this was a different matter, and Bomba was well aware of the danger that he faced. The dashing spray had made the log almost as slippery as glass. The darkness added to the peril. With Pipina in his arms it would be difficult to retain his balance. One slip and the two might go whirling into that seething torrent to a fate that the boy scarcely dared to think about.

Still the jungle lad did not hesitate. In front was the torrent, behind him the headhunters. He chose what he regarded as the lesser of the two evils, relying upon his strength and his sureness of foot to carry him and his burden to the opposite side.

He shut his ears to the menacing roar of the waters. He had defied the fury of torrents before. He would defy it again.

Resolutely Bomba set foot upon the log.

CHAPTER VII

A PERILOUS CROSSING

BENEATH him the waters roared and thundered. Pipina whimpered and besought her gods, but the ears of Bomba were deaf to her cries.

Underfoot the trunk was like glass. The slightest misstep might mean disaster. But Bomba advanced steadily, scarcely troubled by the light weight of the squaw. He was so accustomed to the dark that he hardly needed the faint rays of moonlight that filtered through the trees to tell him where to place his feet.

He was half-way across. Now he was more than half. Before him loomed the dense undergrowth of the farther bank. Suddenly his foot slipped!

For one horrible moment Bomba teetered over eternity.

Pipina sent up a shrill cry, for she expected that moment to be her last.

By a marvelous exercise of muscular control, Bomba balanced himself and retained his foothold upon the log with one foot while he drew

up the other and gradually regained his equilibrium.

But Pipina, in panic, was now squirming about in his arms and disarranging his calculations. He measured the distance still to be traversed, staked his all on one swift run, sped across the treacherous log, and with one last leap reached the farther shore in safety.

A great joy was singing in his heart as he set Pipina on her feet.

"The gods are with us, Pipina!" he exulted. "Where are your bad spirits now? Tell Bomba that!"

"We have not yet reached the maloca of Hondura," the old squaw reminded him, holding tenaciously to her superstition. "It is not well to rejoice too soon. We may yet find evil spirits hiding, waiting for us behind the trees."

But Bomba laughed such fears to scorn. He was buoyant with confidence. Fate had been kind to him thus far that night, fate and his own quick brain and strong arms.

His knowledge of the savages and their ways told him that he and Pipina had passed through the ring of the headhunters. Moreover, the maloca of Hondura was now only two hours' journey away and through a less tangled part of the jungle.

True, there was not a moment that did not

hold possible peril for them. A boa constrictor might dart from a tree branch and seek to encircle them in its folds. The roar of a jaguar might prelude its spring. Every thicket might harbor a bringer of death.

But evil as they were, they were better understood and more easily dealt with than those human enemies, the men who carried at their belts the heads of their victims.

Pipina declared now that she was strong enough to walk, and they made rapid progress through the jungle, and as the first faint heralds of the dawn appeared in the eastern sky they came within sight of the maloca, or village, of Hondura, chief of the Araos tribe, the strongest in that section of the jungle.

When Bomba and his companion reached the outskirts of the native village they found the inhabitants already astir. The wanderers were challenged by scouts, for since the advent of the headhunters a strict watch was kept day and night. But the jungle lad was well known and liked by the members of the tribe. His popularity with them was only second to that of the chief himself, for only a few months before, Bomba had rendered the tribe a service that made him forever secure in their affections.

So Bomba and Pipina were greeted with every manifestation of delight by the sentries and

brought in triumph into the presence of the chief.

The little Pirah, the greatly loved daughter of the chief, was with her father, coaxing and cajoling him as usual for some childish privilege. She gave a squeal of rapture as she saw Bomba and ran to him, flinging her arms about his neck.

"Bomba has come back to us!" she cried, in delight. "Bomba will stay. That make Pirah glad. Pirah very happy."

Hondura had been watching the meeting with a smile upon his wizened face. Now he came forward, and his greeting, though not so demonstrative, was quite as cordial.

"It is good that Bomba is here," he said. "Bomba has not come for many moons. Hondura is glad. He will make a feast for Bomba and all the tribe will rejoice."

"Hondura has a good heart," returned the lad. "He speaks good words and his tongue is not forked. Bomba has come to ask Hondura to help him. He wants to leave Pipina with him where she will be safe while he goes on a journey that may take him many moons."

"Pipina is welcome in the maloca of Hondura," replied the chief, as he turned a kindly look on the old woman, who bowed her head and stood in meek humility before him. "Pipina can stay with the women because she is a friend of Bomba, who is a good friend to the tribe of Hondura."

The chief motioned them to seat themselves upon the cushions of rushes within his tepee, and presently food was brought to them which they devoured eagerly, for they had not eaten since noon of the day before.

While they ate, Hondura questioned them further, while Pirah sat close to the jungle lad, every now and then reaching out a timid little hand to touch him.

"Where is the good white man, Casson?" asked Hondura.

Bomba shook his head sorrowfully.

"Casson has gone away," he replied. "He has wandered into the jungle. The headhunters came last night and burned the cabin of Pipina. Bomba was not there. But when he came he found Pipina hiding. She did not know where Casson had gone."

Fire flashed in Hondura's eyes.

"May the curse of the gods rest on Nascanora," he cried. "Bomba should have killed him the night he had him at his mercy."

The reference was to a happening that had taken place near the Giant Cataract on a night that Bomba had met Nascanora in the midst of a perilous and horrifying scene. As the chief had blocked his path Bomba had sunk the iron hilt of his machete into Nascanora's face, knocking him senseless. Hondura had urged then that

Bomba slay Nascanora, but the boy had refused to kill an enemy who could not fight.

"The point of your knife should have bit into his heart," went on Hondura. "Then he would have troubled you no more. Now he hates you more than before and has sworn to have vengeance. His nose is crushed, and the squaws laugh at him behind his back, though they do not dare to smile where he can see them. He would die happy if he could make Bomba die first."

Bomba laughed.

"He has yet to catch Bomba," he replied. "And if he does catch him, he may wish that he had rather laid his hand upon a cooanaradi. I do not fear Nascanora. But I fear for Casson."

"Hondura is sorry that the good old white man has gone," said the chief gravely. "Hondura like Casson. All the Araos like him. Wish him good."

"The good spirits will be with him in the jungle," put in little Pirah. "They will bring him safely to Bomba again or to one of the bucks of my father."

Hondura smiled indulgently upon the child and put a hand upon the dark hair.

"Pirah speaks well," he remarked. "May the good spirits be with Casson during his journeyings in the jungle."

Bomba thanked them both from his heart and addressed himself to the chief.

"If the good chief meets the white man, Casson, will he bring him to his maloca and keep him safe until Bomba comes back?" he asked.

"That Hondura will do," promised the chief gravely.

For a few moments there was silence, while each stared thoughtfully into the jungle. Then Hondura asked:

"Where does Bomba go now that he speaks of leaving the maloca of Hondura?"

"I shall not leave yet, Hondura," he replied. "First, I shall search for Casson. I will beat every thicket of the jungle until I find him or feel sure that the gods have taken him. Only after that is done will Bomba set out on a long journey."

"The words are dark yet," replied the chief. "Where is Bomba going?"

"Bomba still seeks his parents," returned the lad. "He wants to know about his father and his mother. Even the jaguar's cubs know their father and mother. Bomba does not know. His heart will be heavy till he does know. He has tried to learn the truth for many moons. He has gone to the land of the Giant Cataract. He has traveled to the Moving Mountain. He has gone to the snake island of Sobrinini. He has jour-

neyed many miles and met many dangers, and he does not yet know the truth."

"Where does Bomba go now to find the truth?" asked the chief, his eyes dwelling thoughtfully on the lad.

"I go to seek Japazy, the half-breed," replied Bomba. "Japazy may tell Bomba what he wishes to know. Jojasta is gone. Sobrinini is gone. Casson is gone. Japazy is the one hope of Bomba. If Japazy is dead—"

He did not finish the sentence, but with a shrug of his shoulder stared gloomily before him.

There was an interval of silence, and when the chief spoke again it was in a low and solemn tone.

"Where is it," he asked, "that Bomba would seek for Japazy, the half-breed?"

Bomba hesitated for a moment, then spoke:

"I go to a spot where it is said I may find Japazy. I go to Jaguar Island."

The stoic calm of the Indian vanished. A look of horror sprang into his eyes.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WARNING

THE chief of the Araos leaned toward Bomba and spoke in a voice charged with intensity:

"Hondura is a friend of Bomba. Hondura speaks wise words. If Bomba is wise, he will stay in the maloca of Hondura and not go to the island of the big cats."

Bomba looked puzzled.

"Why does Hondura tell this to Bomba?" he queried.

"Because Hondura is friend of Bomba," replied the chief gravely. "He would not see Bomba put his head within the jaws of death."

"Is it because it is called Jaguar Island?" persisted the lad. "Is it the big cats Hondura fears?"

The Indian shook his head.

"The danger Hondura fears for Bomba," he answered impressively, "is not of this world. It is of the world beyond. Be warned in time, Bomba. Hondura has spoken."

Although Bomba had been taught by Casson to

laugh at the superstitions of the natives, he had lived his life too far from civilization not to share to some extent their primitive fear of the supernatural.

The words of Hondura sent a strange chill through him. What did the Indian mean?

"Of what danger speak you, Hondura?" he asked in an awed voice. "Tell Bomba, so that he may know the truth."

"Once a great many moons ago," began Hondura, "there was above the island of the great cats a big, strange city."

The eyes of Bomba glistened.

"Tell me of it!" he cried.

"Those that knew of it said it was a city of devils, though its beauty was that of the sun."

"What made its beauty like the sun?" was Bomba's eager query.

"The towers," replied Hondura, "were of gold and reached upward like trees to the sky. When men looked upon them long they had to cover their eyes with their hands. Else they would have gone blind."

"I wish that the eyes of Bomba might have seen it, Hondura!" exclaimed the lad. He thought longingly of those faraway cities described to him by the boy named Frank, the white boy, son of the woman with the golden hair, who had once kissed Bomba as though he had been her son.

Perhaps this city with towers of gold was like those others. So he looked eagerly, yearningly, at the wrinkled face of the grizzled chieftain who spoke with such a calm air of assurance.

"It is many moons since the eyes of men have rested upon that city," returned the Indian sternly, seeming by his manner to rebuke the boy's enthusiasm.

Bomba was abashed, but asked with undiminished curiosity:

"What then became of the city of gold, Hondura? Tell Bomba so that he may know the truth. His heart is thirsty like that of the tapir that bends its head toward the cool water."

"The city sank into the earth," returned Hondura. "Slowly the mud of the swamp crept up over it and the towers of gold were covered so that they no more made blind the eyes of men."

The chief seemed to sink into a reverie after this announcement, and Bomba ventured to remind him of his presence by asking another question.

"The city is gone. Where then is the danger to Bomba, O good and wise chief?"

Hondura roused himself from his abstraction and stared at Bomba almost as though he were looking through him to something sinister that lay beyond.

"It is true that the city is gone. But strange ghosts arise from it, spirits that harm."

The little Pirah cried out sharply, and Pipina started a long eerie wail that chilled Bomba to the marrow of his bones.

"The evil spirits walk abroad at night," the chief continued, "and woe is the portion of those who meet them. For they carry with them pain and pestilence and death. Of those who have met them in the darkness of the night none have come back alive."

Bomba was impressed despite himself. Nevertheless his determination remained unshaken.

"The cause of Bomba is a good one," he said simply. "Bomba does not fear the evil spirits."

"Hondura knows that Bomba does not fear anything living," the chief responded. "But he has no arrow that will sink into the breasts of the dead. He has no knife that can reach their hearts. They will not fear when Bomba defies them. They will laugh."

"I am going," the lad declared.

The old chief nodded his head as though, knowing Bomba, he had expected some such answer from the boy.

"Go then. But go only to the island of the big cats. Do not go to the place above the island where the city with the towers of gold stood. Find Japazy, the half-breed, and return with speed. Hondura and the little Pirah will watch for you. And we will have prayers made

by the medicine man that you do not meet the evil spirits."

"But do not go yet," pleaded Pirah, clinging to his hand. "Pirah wants you to stay days, many days. You are tired. You have been fighting. We will make big feast if you will stay in the maloca of Hondura for a time."

Bomba returned the pressure of the warm little hand affectionately.

"Pirah is good and Hondura too is good," he said earnestly. "Bomba would be glad to stay. But he must go."

He turned to the chief.

"I go first into the jungle to hunt for Casson," he said. "I will look for him till I find him or feel sure that he is dead. If I find him, I will bring him back to stay with Hondura. If I do not find him, I will go on to find Japazy on Jaguar Island."

Pipina set up a wail, but Bomba checked her.

"Do not cry, Pipina," he said. "Bomba has many times gone into the jungle and come back again. Did he not go to the Moving Mountain and return? Did he not come back from the Giant Cataract and the island of snakes? The gods will watch over me, and you can stay here safe with the women of Hondura's tribe and help them with their cooking and their weaving. And you can tell them of the hole in the floor and how

you were wiser than all the warriors of Nascanora."

The last was cunningly put, and the look of pride that came into the old woman's eyes showed that if the Araos women failed to appreciate her strategy it would not be for lack of telling.

Bomba turned to the chief.

"Your heart is big, Hondura, and your heart is good," he said. "Bomba will not forget."

"It is but little that Hondura is doing for Bomba," the old chieftain replied. "Did not Bomba save my people? Did he not bring back the women and little children that Nascanora's bucks had stolen? My people would die for Bomba. And I will tell my braves to hunt for Casson. Wherever they go their eyes will be open for the old white man. They will be looking while Bomba is on his way to Jaguar Island. And if he is alive, they will find him."

The assurance was an immense comfort to the heart of Bomba. If his own search for Casson failed, he would know that a host of sharp eyes were taking up his work. All that could be done would be done for the old man he loved.

He stayed at the maloca only long enough to get some more strings for his bow and to replenish his stock of arrows and put an additional edge on his machete. Then, with a warm farewell to Hondura, Pirah, Pipina, and the assembled

people of the tribe, he plunged into the jungle.

He thought longingly of the "fire stick" and the cartridges that had been destroyed in the blazing cabin. He took the now useless revolver from his pouch where he carried it in a waterproof covering and looked at it sadly. It was a fine weapon, and he had learned to use it effectively, though not yet with the perfect accuracy of the machete and the bow and arrows.

"The fire stick might not hurt the ghosts from the sunken city," he pondered, as he turned the revolver lovingly in his hands; "but against the beasts of the jungle and the braves of Nascanora it speaks with the voice of death. And who knows but what it might save my life when I reach the place of the big cats."

Again his anger flamed against the headhunters.

"They may still, by robbing me of my cartridges, be the cause of my death," he murmured.

But he had the fatalistic philosophy born of his life in the jungle. The cartridges were gone. He could not help it. Perhaps it had been decreed. Who was he, Bomba, to find fault with the laws that governed the world?

For all the rest of that day he hunted feverishly for some trace of Casson. Hardly a foot of ground escaped his eager scrutiny. He searched every thicket, explored every swamp. At times, when he felt it was safe, he raised his voice in

the hope that perhaps Casson might hear him. But all his efforts were fruitless. There was no trace or sound of his half-demented protector.

During his search he had gathered some turtle eggs, and these he roasted at night over a fire before the opening of a cave that he had chosen for the night's shelter.

The food was succulent, the fire comforting, and the cave reasonably safe. Bomba built up the fire so that it should serve through the night to keep off the prowling denizens of the forest, and made his refuge secure by rolling a great stone that no animal could dislodge to the entrance of the cave.

Then he lay down and slept, not opening his tired eyes till the first break of dawn.

All that day and the next Bomba hunted for Cody Casson. He had given himself three days before he would relinquish the quest as hopeless.

Occasionally he came upon traces of the head-hunters. But the tracks were cold, and Bomba calculated that they were at least five days old. If the bucks were in that region at all, they were probably lurking in the vicinity of the cabin, where, soon or late, they could count on Bomba's reappearance.

Toward the evening of the third day Bomba caught sight of something strange lying at the

roots of a great tree in one of the most extensive swamps with which the region abounded.

At first sight it looked like a crumpld heap of rags. Bomba's thought was that it was the remains of an old hammock or native rug thrown aside as useless.

But there was something in the shape of it that made him revise his opinion, and he approached it with the caution that he always used when in the presence of something which he did not understand.

When at last he stood beside it he started back with a gasp.

It was a skeleton that lay there amid the shreds of garments that had previously clothed the body!

Bomba had seen such grisly sights before. They were not uncommon in the jungle, where natives without number met their end by the jaws of the puma and the fangs of the snake.

No, it was not the mere sight of a skeleton that made Bomba start so violently.

It was the fact that *the skeleton was that of a white man!*

CHAPTER IX

THE SKELETON

BOMBA knew at once that the poor remnant of humanity that lay before him was not that of a native of the country.

He knew it by the character of the hair that still adhered to the scalp, by the fragments of skin that still were in evidence.

And he knew by the clothes, which, though tattered into shreds, were similar to those that had been worn by Gillis and Dorn, by the men of the Parkhurst family. They were of heavy khaki cut after the civilized fashion.

Some hunter, no doubt; a hunter after big game or a hunter of rubber trees, who had come into the dark recesses of the Amazonian jungle.

Various signs indicated that the body had been there for some time. How the man had died would never be known. Somewhere in the civilized world he was marked down as "missing." The jungle kept its secrets well.

Bomba stood looking down at the skeleton with a strange feeling in his heart. This man

had been white! He had been a brother to Bomba, of the same blood, of the same race! A sense of kinship tugged at the lad's heart.

And because he had been white, Bomba determined that the poor remains should have decent burial. He sought out a suitable piece of wood and with his machete fashioned a rude spade. With this he set to work and soon had dug a grave in the soft and muddy ground.

He lifted the skeleton reverently and bore it to the grave. As he did so, something dropped with a metallic sound. He paid no attention to this at the moment, but bestowed the bones carefully in the grave. Then he covered it and rolled great stones over the top that the last resting place of the stranger might be undisturbed.

He knew little of prayer. He had seen, to be sure, the incantations that the medicine men made to their gods. But something confused and vague shaped itself in his mind, an unspoken request that all might be well with the white man, wherever his spirit might be. For was not the white man Bomba's brother?

He was turning away when his eye caught sight of the something that he had heard drop to the ground. He looked at it indifferently for a moment and then he pounced upon it eagerly.

It was a belt of cartridges!

He handled the objects with a delight beyond

all bounds. It was like a gift from the gods. With a trembling hand he took his revolver from its pouch. The cartridges fitted perfectly!

Bomba was in a frenzy of rapture. He wanted to shout, to dance, to sing. Now he had another effective weapon, a formidable addition to his machete and his bow and arrows.

"I gave the white man burial, and he has given me these," he said to himself. "He knew that Bomba, too, was white! He knew that Bomba was his brother!"

Where there were cartridges there were likely to be weapons, and Bomba scanned the surrounding spaces carefully. But neither rifle nor revolver was to be seen. Bomba conjectured that natives, passing, might have found and appropriated these as curiosities, though they did not know how to use them. The fact that the cartridge belt had not been disturbed was probably due to a superstitious repugnance to touch a dead body for fear it would bring evil fortune.

It was with a vastly increased confidence that Bomba at last betook himself from the scene.

His steps now turned toward a trail about which he had learned from the caboclos of the district, a trail that after long journeying would lead him to the river and to Jaguar Island, where Japazy dwelt.

If Bomba could find and keep to this trail, it

would lead him more quickly to his destination and lessen the danger of his becoming lost in a section of the jungle into which he had not yet penetrated.

It was two days later that Bomba came upon the trail he sought. He recognized it with a feeling of joy and thanksgiving.

"Bomba is sure now of finding the way to Jaguar Island," he told himself. "If Japazy is there, all may be well. If not, Bomba will have his long journey for nothing."

As he struck out along the trail the lad was seized by a desire for speed that was almost panic. Again and again the thought came to him, giving new stimulus to his steps:

"I may be an hour too late. I may be only a minute too late. If I reach the island and find Japazy gone, what then? He is Bomba's one hope. Without the knowledge Japazy has, Bomba is doomed to live in the jungle forever. Bomba will never know about Bartow and Laura and the boy they called Bonny. Bomba must put wings to his feet."

All that day he flogged himself along with this thought, stopping only to tear off and eat a strip of the tapir meat that he had brought with him from the village of Hondura.

Bomba could not go without food, but he could go without sleep, or at least do with very little.

But exhausted nature took its toll after he had traveled through the long hours of the night and faced a gray-streaked dawn, spent and haggard-eyed.

Sleep weighted his eyelids, dragged at his feet. Bomba lay down and slept.

In his sleep he dreamed. It was a terrible dream, and in it he was back again in the heart of the Moving Mountain. Flames licked at him hungrily, strange grumblings and roarings resounded about him, and yet he could make no move to escape.

With a mighty gasping effort, Bomba heaved his body beyond the reach of the fire—and opened his eyes!

Instantly he was wide awake. Night had crept upon him while he slept, and now upon the wings of darkness rode a fearful storm filling the jungle with wailings and thunderings.

Bomba leaped to his feet and looked about him.

"I have slept the day away!" was his first angry thought. "If Bomba does not find Japazy it will be his own fault!"

But this consideration was soon swept aside by the realization of his own immediate peril.

With every moment the storm increased in fury. So far, it had been wind and thunder and lightning, but no rain. Now the heavens opened and the rain descended in blinding torrents.

Bomba was at a loss as to where to fly for shelter. His surroundings were strange to him. He had slept in a thorn thicket that had protected him from the inroad of wild beasts, but now offered little refuge from the storm. He knew of no cave or native hut in the immediate vicinity.

While he hesitated, there was a rending crash above his head.

He leaped back, but not in time. A tree, as though uprooted by a giant's hand, crashed to the ground, bearing all before it.

Bomba felt himself flung through the air, was conscious of a piercing pain in the back of his head, and then for a time knew nothing.

How long he lay pinioned beneath the branches of the tree, Bomba did not know. But when he woke again to a knowledge of his surroundings he found that the storm still raged through the jungle. His head ached fiercely and he felt dizzy and sick.

His head was resting in something sticky and soft. Bomba thought at first that it might be blood from his head, for he remembered a terrific blow as he fell.

Both hands were imprisoned by the branches, but after considerable effort he managed to free one of them. This he moved cautiously about to the back of his head. There was a bump on it as

big as an egg, but he could discover no gash in the scalp.

His head then was not lying in a pool of blood. It was imbedded in the thick oozy mud of a swamp.

By a great strain he lifted his head a trifle and heard the thick suck of the ooze as it reluctantly released its prey.

Then did Bomba's heart almost misgive him. He could reconstruct now what had happened. The outflung branches of the tree had swept him over the border of the treacherous ygapo near which he had been sleeping.

He lay now, half upon solid ground and half in the swamp. The branches of the tree pinioned the lower part of his body, but his head and shoulders rested in the thick muck. Then, with a thrill of horror, he realized that he was sinking deeper. He knew how readily the ygapo engulfed anything that ventured upon it.

Had his whole body lain in the ooze and had his unconsciousness persisted much longer, he would already have been in so deep that to extricate himself would have been impossible. But the solid ground beneath the lower part of his body gave him a certain purchase, and he strained to the utmost to raise his head and shoulders so as to make their weight as light as possible.

His plight was desperate. The branches of the

tree reached to his shoulders. He could manage to use only his left hand and arm, for the right one seemed to be numb. It had no sense of feeling. Bomba knew that it must have received a hard blow, perhaps be broken.

With the free use of his machete he might have hacked a way through to freedom, although even with the aid of the knife it would have been a slow and painful process.

But the machete was in his belt near that right hand that had no sense of feeling. To get at it with his left he would first have to break away the branches that pressed so heavily upon his chest. And to do this with his bare hands seemed impossible.

Bomba tried to hold his head above the ooze, raising it by the sheer strength of his shoulders until the straining muscles could no longer bear the weight. And when, groaning, he let his head sink back, the mud sucked at it gloatingly.

"This, then, is the end of Bomba," the lad muttered to himself gloomily. "He would have liked to die on his feet, fighting. But he must die here alone like any trapped beast of the jungle."

The jungle! There lay the nub of his bitterness. Why should he be in the jungle, he a white boy, whose rightful heritage of a life with his own kind had been denied him by a cruel fate? Why did he not have a home like that of Frank

Parkhurst, a father who was proud of him, a mother who loved him? Why had he been fated to have his life placed every day in jeopardy? He had been cheated of what belonged to him equally with every other boy of the white race.

"I shall never see Casson now, if he be still alive," he murmured. "Japazy, the half-breed, will die with the secret that I seek still hidden in his heart."

Then his anger at fate turned against himself.

"Bomba was a fool to sleep," he gritted through his clenched teeth. "If he had been awake, he would have seen the storm approaching and would have found some cave or overhanging rock for shelter. Bomba is a fool and deserves to die."

He began tearing at the branches with his one free hand, though he knew he could not lift that weight from his chest. He lifted his head and tried to reach the twigs with his teeth. He was half mad with rage and black despair.

Then, in a turning of his head, he saw a sight that chilled his blood. His body became instantly as rigid as stone.

Not ten feet from him he saw a mass of coils that he recognized from the markings as that of the Brazilian rattlesnake, the jararaca.

The mass lay almost motionless and, except for an occasional slight heaving as from breath-

ing, the reptile might have seemed dead. The head was not visible.

Was it sleeping? Or had it perhaps been wounded, swept to that place as Bomba had been by the branches of the tree?

If the reptile were sleeping, any movement of Bomba's might wake it. Even if it were wounded, it would certainly make an effort to destroy the lad if it should discover him.

It seemed only a matter of dying in one way or another. Either the snake or the swamp would bring him death. In either case his death would be a horrible one.

Oh, if he were only on his feet, machete in hand!

There was a movement of the sluggish coils. Bomba watched them with a horrid fascination, scarcely daring to breathe.

Gradually the coils unwound. The hideous triangular head came in sight. The reptile looked slowly about as though deciding which way to go.

Then the snake saw Bomba!

CHAPTER X

WRITHING COILS

BOMBA saw the malignant fury that came into the snake's eyes. He knew that the reptile had seen him, and over the boy's face, like a pallid cloak, spread the calmness of despair.

This then was the end! He might live perhaps ten, fifteen, possibly twenty minutes after the poison fangs had sunk into his flesh, and they would be minutes of such intolerable agony that death, when it came, would be welcomed as a friend.

The snake uncoiled and crawled swiftly toward Bomba until it came within striking distance. Then it threw itself into a coil and reared its head.

Bomba saw that head, those open jaws dripping poison, closed his eyes and waited for death.

But even while he waited, something swished past his head, coming from the tree above.

It was a castanha nut, one of those huge, heavy nuts that, falling on a man's head, may fracture his skull.

The missile, flung with deadly aim, hit the head of the rattlesnake, crushing it into pulp.

Bomba opened his eyes as the coils of the dead snake writhed and lashed about his head.

By some miracle the enemy had been vanquished. Was it the storm that had loosened the great nut which was almost as large as Bomba's head? If so, it was perhaps a sign from the gods of the Indians that Bomba was not to die until his work should be accomplished.

But his first joy at his deliverance was quickly followed by apprehension and the realization that he might still be in the shadow of death. He had escaped the fangs of the serpent. But who or what could rescue him from the greedy clutch of the swamp?

As though in answer to the thought, something dropped from the tree beside him.

What was this? A new enemy?

Bomba lay very still as the shape came toward him. Whether it was man or beast he could not tell, for there was no word from the one or growl from the other.

Then a hairy paw was laid upon his arm, and Bomba thrilled with a new hope. He knew the touch of that paw, knew that at last he had met a friend.

"Doto!" he cried. "Good Doto! So you have come to Bomba. And Bomba never needed you more."

The friendly monkey, almost the size of Bomba

himself, pressed close to Bomba's side and cha tered delightedly. For he was one of the chi animal friends that Bomba had made in the ju gle. Bomba had once saved Doto's life, and mo than once since then Doto had been of great ser ice to Bomba in warning him of enemies.

Bomba was exceedingly fond of the big mo key, and now he stroked the hairy arm and he affectionately.

"Once more Doto has saved the life Bomba," the lad said. "Bomba is grateful."

The monkey pressed against him, answeri in a language Bomba had come to understar But suddenly Doto sprang to his feet, looki about him excitedly. He began to jabber wild and Bomba knew that he scented danger of so kind.

Perhaps some wild beast was approachir Perhaps the headhunters were creeping up them.

"Doto wants Bomba to be free?" ask Bomba, and the monkey broke into a chatter assent. "Then Doto must help Bomba," and t lad pointed to the mass of branches that h him prisoner.

"Doto break branches so that Bomba can g knife that is at his belt," directed the jungle b

The monkey appeared to understand and set work at once, breaking off the smaller branch

nd bending the larger ones so that he could each beneath them.

The storm was clearing away. The rain had lmost stopped, the wind blew in fitful gusts. omba stared up at the sky while hope once more owed like a warm flood into his heart.

"The machete, Doto!" he cried. "Get the big nife of Bomba!"

He had often showed the knife to Doto in eir conferences in the forest and boasted of its ower. Doto knew what Bomba meant when he oke of the machete, and he knew also that omba carried it at his belt. He reached his rry paw beneath the branches and drew forth e weapon.

Bomba gave a cry of delight as his hand once ore closed on the haft of his faithful machete.

"Good Doto!" he exclaimed. "Bomba has his ig knife. All is well again."

The task of cutting away the imprisoning anches was a laborious one, flat upon his back s he was and having only the use of his left and.

But it was the faithful Doto who lifted the oy's head from the ooze and supported his oulder so that he could do the work more asily.

Gradually the bonds across his chest relaxed eir grip. Doto raised him higher and higher

until he had reached a sitting position. Then the work went on apace.

Bomba tried to move his right arm but found that there was still no feeling in it. He did not spend any time over it, but went on hacking away with his left hand.

He grew tired and paused at times to rest, but it was always Doto that urged him on to fresh effort. That the monkey scented danger, Bomba knew, and yet, listen as he would, he could hear no sound that had menace in it.

Still he trusted the instinct of the monkey. The ears of Bomba were keen, but those of Doto were keener still.

So he forced himself to labor when his muscles were crying out urgently for rest. Gradually the weight upon his legs lifted. He found that he could move one of them, then the other.

"Bomba thinks he can get out now, if Doto will help," said the lad.

He placed the monkey's paws beneath his shoulders and signified that it was to pull with all its strength.

This Doto did, and Bomba ground his teeth with pain as he was at last drawn clear of the branches.

With difficulty he stood upon his feet, leaning heavily against Doto.

He was stiff and sore in every muscle. It was agony even to draw a deep breath.

Still, the heart of the lad swelled with exultation and a new sense of power. He stood upright, his machete was at his side; his bow was still intact, his quiver full of arrows, and in his pouch was his greatly prized revolver, once again fully loaded.

He felt of his right arm and found that it was unbroken. There was a numbness in it that gave place to pain as the blood began to pulse strongly through it, but Bomba knew that in a short time it would be as well as ever.

"The bones of Bomba bend but they do not break," the lad exulted.

But Doto's anxiety was still unabated. His uneasiness increased with every moment, and he pressed closely against Bomba, urging him to leave the spot.

Bomba tried a few steps and found that he could walk, though waveringly. So he motioned to the monkey to go ahead and lead the way.

This Doto did with great alacrity, pausing when his pace became too swift for Bomba and waiting till the boy caught up with him.

Thus they traveled for a considerable distance through the jungle. The storm had worn itself out. The tree tops were still agitated by occasional sharp gusts of wind, but where Bomba and

Doto sped along the jungle lay in an almost death-like hush.

"Where is it that Doto takes Bomba?" asked the lad, easing his bruised muscles as he paused to rest. "We must not go too far from the trail, for Bomba must press on to the island of the big cats where lives Japazy, the half-breed."

For answer Doto broke into a frantic chattering and pulled the boy along by the arm.

Suddenly the eyes of Bomba narrowed and he pressed a hand over the monkey's mouth.

"Wait!" he commanded sharply. "Bomba has heard something in the jungle."

The monkey's chatter ceased, and behind him in the darkness Bomba heard the faint sound of padding feet.

He listened and heard it again, but not in the same place. Again the faint pad, pad of feet moving stealthily, but this time more to the east.

Once more that ominous sound. This time to the north.

Bomba knew that sound. He knew the smell that came to his keen nostrils.

Pumas! Three of them at least. They were stalking him, moving in a semicircle, closing in upon him!

CHAPTER XI

THE TRAILING PUMAS

AGAINST one puma, despite its terrible teeth and claws, Bomba would have had a fair chance of success in warding off an attack. His arrow might reach its heart before it could spring.

But if three attacked at once, he would have no chance at all. He and Doto must reach some place of safety quickly, or they were lost.

Doto was tugging frantically at his arm, and Bomba broke into a quick pantherlike run. But the pumas quickened their pace also, instinct telling them that their intended surprise had failed. There was the breaking of brushwood all about as the great beasts burst through.

With Doto still clutching his arm, Bomba and the monkey plunged together into a dark and narrow passage.

Even as they rushed within the cave, the pumas sprang to the attack.

But two of them, in making for the hole through which their prey threatened to escape, collided with a thud of heavy bodies.

The entrance was too narrow for both, and their heads were jammed together.

They pulled back, snapping and snarling, and in a second were engaged in deadly combat.

The diversion seemed to give Bomba the chance that he wanted. He slipped the bow from his shoulder and drew an arrow from his quiver.

But the implement must have been injured in the fall of the tree, for as Bomba drew it taut the frayed string broke with an ominous snap.

Bomba threw the bow aside with an exclamation of anger. Then he drew his revolver from its pouch and, reaching for his machete, held it in his left hand.

With either he could wound, perhaps kill, one of his enemies. But he was still uncertain but what the others would have to be reckoned with, and, in that case, he knew how slim his chances were of coming through the fight alive.

The two pumas still fought, however, locked in a deadly embrace that would probably mean death for one of them, perhaps both. In their struggle they had rolled a short distance from the mouth of the cave, and Bomba could hear them thrashing about in the brushwood.

But where was the third puma?

Then Bomba felt rather than heard the stealthy approach of the great brute.

Two yellow glints appeared before the mouth

of the cave. Two glaring, sinister eyes peered in. Bomba shrank back into the darkness and his grip tightened about his weapons.

But as he waited, braced for the attack, he felt a sharp pull on his arm. It came from Doto, who was chattering wildly.

Bomba tried to shake off the paw.

"Do not hinder Bomba, Doto," he hissed through his set teeth. "Bomba fights for his life."

But Doto persisted, and by main strength drew Bomba back, took the boy's hand, and laid it upon something that was cold to the touch. Instantly Bomba grasped the monkey's meaning.

Here was a rock, a great rock, set not far from the entrance. If they could roll it across that gaping opening, their lives might yet be saved.

The fierce snarling of the fighting pumas came to them from the dense shadow of the underbrush. They were busy doing Bomba's work for him. Far more fearsome at the moment was that huge figure at the mouth of the cave.

The third puma was cautious. The hole was black. The man creature would be armed with things that stung. The beast still limped from an arrow wound in the leg, probably inflicted by an Indian, and was distrustful of the creatures that walked on two legs.

Bomba hastily thrust his weapons back into his pouch. With the help of Doto, who was stronger

than the average man, he rolled the great stone slowly, strainingly, toward the yawning mouth of the cave.

Four feet, five, six. They pushed pantingly. The rock already covered part of the entrance, but there was still room for the puma to push through.

At this point the beast realized what they were trying to do!

With a blood-curdling snarl of rage it leaped forward. With one great despairing heave Bomba and Doto pushed the rock against the opening, sealing it.

Not a minute, not a second too soon!

The great stone caught the foot of the puma, crushing it. With a roar of rage and pain the brute pulled the injured member free and limped away, all the fight taken out of him for the time.

Bomba leaned against the rock, exhausted but jubilant. Doto crouched close beside him, trembling.

Bomba reached out a hand and caressed the head of the faithful monkey.

"Bomba has good friend in Doto," said the lad earnestly. "Doto could have saved himself in the trees and left Bomba to the hungry jaws of the puma. Again Doto has saved the life of Bomba, and Bomba will not forget."

The monkey snuggled closer against him and

made a little contented sound like a child that is happy and humming softly to itself.

"But what Bomba does not understand," went on the jungle boy, speaking more to himself than the monkey, "is how Doto was so sure of finding the cave. Has Doto been here before?"

Doto made a sound that Bomba interpreted as assent.

Bomba made a quick exploration of the cave to make sure that there was no entrance from the back. Then he lay down for a much-needed rest.

His body was sore and aching, and he was exhausted physically and mentally by the fearful strain he had undergone.

Doto lay down close to him, content to be within reaching distance of a pat from the boy's hand.

The mind of Bomba was full of many things. He was both glad and sorrowful. Glad, because twice that night he had been snatched from the very jaws of death. Sorrowful, because by reason of these perils he had been delayed so long on his journey to Japazy.

The panic of dread was still upon him lest on reaching Jaguar Island he might find Japazy gone.

And Casson! Dear old Casson! Was he still in the land of the living? Had the Hondura perchance found him, and was he now safe and sound in the friendly maloca? Bomba scarcely dared

hope, and yet he forced himself to hope, for he could not bear the thought that he might not see the old man again.

Bomba was glad of the presence of Doto, because it relieved to some extent his loneliness. Yet even this thought was not without its bitter quality.

"Bomba is white," he said to himself, "and yet he is grateful for the presence of a friendly beast of the jungle. Will Bomba never know even his name? Will he never know the name of the beautiful woman in the picture, the lovely face that seemed to smile down at Bomba?"

Musing thus, he fell asleep and did not wake until the sun was painting the jungle in a riot of gorgeous colors.

It was dark within the cave, but Bomba knew that the morning had come by the screaming of the parrots and the chattering of the monkeys in the jungle without.

He was bent like an old man because of the soreness in his muscles, and one leg was lame where the cruel branches of the descending tree had bruised the tendons.

Doto sensed his condition, and tried by chatter and gesture to induce the boy to remain in the cave for a while until his bruised body was well again.

Bomba hesitated, for he knew well that he

should not face the dangers of the jungle in his half-crippled condition. The cave was safe. There was enough cooked meat in the pouch at his waist to feed both Doto and himself, if the monkey should elect to stay with him.

The boy was tempted. But then the great urge to be on his way swept over him. He thought of Japazy and what he would lose, how great would be his desperation if he failed to meet the half-breed and get from him the secret of his birth.

So slowly, reluctantly, he shook his head.

"Bomba must go on, Doto," he said, as he smoothed the shaggy head. The cave is warm and safe and comfortable and there is meat in plenty for Bomba and Doto, but Bomba must go into the jungle to meet whatever waits for him there. Bomba cannot linger here, even though his going may mean death to him. He must take his chance."

Bomba offered the monkey some of his share of the tapir meat. But Doto shook his head. He would eat meat if he were starving, but he preferred the cocoanuts that he had only to break open to get at their succulent contents.

But Bomba ate ravenously of the tapir meat, for he had had nothing to eat since morning of the day before. The food put new life into him and prepared him for the strenuous task that lay before him.

With the help of Doto he rolled back the stone from before the entrance of the cave. They left a space only wide enough for their own bodies to pass through, if a survey of their surroundings should signal the need of retreat.

There was a chance that one of the pumas at least had not been content to leave the spot where the boy and the monkey had disappeared. The enemy might still be waiting among the trees or thickets ready to pounce on the first that should issue forth from the cave.

So Bomba moved with the caution that was habitual with him, hand on his machete, eyes darting in all directions.

Doto swung himself into the treetops and described a wide circle about the spot. Bomba knew that precious little would escape the monkey's prying eyes.

Suddenly the monkey's chatter became so loud and agitated that Bomba thought it might be meant as a warning to him, and began to make a hasty retreat toward the cave.

But in a moment he realized that it was not a warning but a summons, and he began slowly to approach the tree from which Doto was hanging by one paw. With the other he was pointing eagerly to something that lay on the ground, hidden, so far, from Bomba's view.

The boy pushed aside the underbrush and then understood what had caused Doto's agitation.

A giant puma lay on its side in a pool of blood, its throat horribly mangled and torn.

One of the gladiators of the night before!

Bomba knew that but for the timely interference and help of Doto, he, too, might have been lying in some such pool as this. But he would not have been as intact as the puma. All that would have been left of him would have been a few scattered bones. He would have furnished a royal meal for the denizens of the jungle.

He stood for a moment looking thoughtfully at the beast, his eyes gleaming, lips drawn back a little to show two rows of even white teeth.

Then he flung back his head and turned to the monkey.

"Bomba will never forget what Doto has done," he said. "But now Bomba must go. He must say farewell to Doto. It may be many moons before Bomba will see Doto again."

The monkey whimpered and put his hand on Bomba's shoulder. No human being could have asked more clearly that he be permitted to go along.

But Bomba smiled affectionately and patted the creature's head.

"Bomba must go alone," he said. "He must sail great waters where Doto would be lonely and

afraid because there were not any trees. Doto must go back to his own people. But if he ever needs Bomba and can call to him, Bomba will come. For Doto has been a good friend to Bomba."

He pointed to a tree, and the monkey left him slowly and reluctantly, swung himself into the tree, and was soon lost to sight among the foliage.

Bomba looked after him sadly, sighed, and then began preparations for his journey.

First he looked to his weapons. He found the revolver in perfect shape, its waterproof covering having protected it from moisture. He took one of the strongest and most pliant strings of those that Hondura had given him and strung it to his bow. He tested it in every way until he knew that it could be absolutely depended upon.

For of all his weapons the one on which he placed most reliance was his bow. To this, he had been habituated almost from babyhood, and the skill he had attained was phenomenal. Gillis and Dorn, the white rubber hunters, had been dumbfounded at the marvelous accuracy of his shooting.

At close range with a human opponent the revolver perhaps would prove the most efficient. But at a longer distance the bow was the better. He could send an arrow clear through the body of any beast of the jungle. The alligator's body

with its tough armor might defy the shaft. But the alligator had eyes and, small as they were, they supplied a big enough target for Bomba to pierce.

"Without this bow," murmured Bomba to himself, as he gave it an affectionate pat and slung it over his shoulder, "what chance would Bomba have to find meat to eat? How could he defend himself against the wild beasts that seek his life? He would be helpless and could never hope to reach the island of the big cats."

In his flight to the cave from the pumas Bomba had departed widely from his original trail, and it took him some time to find it again. This he did at last, and struck out once more for that river that flowed about the island where Japazy dwelt.

He knew that he was now about to enter upon the most dangerous part of his journey. The region into which he was penetrating was wild and perilous and filled with pitfalls for the unwary traveler. Because of the superstition surrounding the sunken city with the towers of gold, the Indians gave this district a wide berth, and it was almost wholly devoid of human life.

As a result, the beasts that inhabited the region had grown bolder and more savage than in more thickly populated sections. There were no bows and arrows, no poisoned traps to thin their num-

bers. A traveler needed eyes in the back of his head, and at the sides as well, to guard himself against the dangers that surrounded him.

Another handicap attached itself to Bomba's journey. In that part of the jungle where Bomba had grown up he had learned of places of refuge for times of sudden stress. He knew of caves, of crevices only wide enough for himself to squeeze through, of deserted cabins, of hollow trees, of a host of similar hiding places and temporary fortresses. More than once these had saved his life when he was hard-pressed. But in this new region that he was entering he was a complete stranger. If he came upon a refuge, it would be by chance. And his foes were legion.

Bomba would have figured out all of these things by himself, even if he had not been warned by his friend, Hondura. But not for a moment did he dream of turning back. As far as is possible to human nature, the lad was absolutely devoid of fear. And now, with his trusty bow again in shape, he went on with renewed confidence.

He came to the banks of a stream and rubbed his sore muscles with the warm mud. This took some of the ache from them, and he found that he could walk with greater ease and make much better progress. His spirits rose as he dried himself and swung off buoyantly on the trail.

"Bomba may still be in time to see Japazy and get the truth from his lips," he assured himself, and in that mood felt capable of moving mountains, even that formidable mountain on which Jojasta had dwelt.

The hope that before many days had sped he would have realized his heart's desire quickened his steps until he found himself breaking into a run.

For two days more he traveled along a trail that grew ever more difficult. The lack of human inhabitants had caused the trail in many places to be overgrown, and Bomba's machete was in almost constant requisition to hack a way for him. This involved not only arduous labor but the loss of precious time, and the boy fumed and fretted. Yet he never grew discouraged, never even thought of turning back.

Bomba had never heard the word "impossible." If he had, he would not have understood it. If it had been explained to him, he would have laughed and refused to believe it. Nothing was impossible to Bomba, if he had determined to do it. It would take nothing less than death to prove that he had been mistaken.

The food he had brought with him from Hondura's camp grew monotonous before long, but he managed to vary his diet by turtle eggs, fish and the bringing down of an occasional wild pig.

Sometimes he stopped to cook the meat; at other times he ate it raw. Always he hurried on, flogging himself to renewed effort, allowing only the most meager intervals for food and rest.

Then one day, when he had come upon the trail of a tapir and was stalking it, that sixth sense of his told him that he, too, was being followed.

He faced about and stood tense and silent, eyes searching the shadows of the jungle.

At first he heard and saw nothing and was almost inclined to chide himself for his suspicions. Then a slight movement in the underbrush at his right caught his eye.

Now he saw what had before been hidden from him, a crouching, sinuous body, ears laid flat against a wicked head, eyes gleaming and greedy.

"A jaguar!" muttered Bomba, as he quickly fitted an arrow to his bow. "Already they lie in wait for me. Bomba must kill this one as a warning to the others to beware."

But even as Bomba stretched his bow, the jaguar, giving a ferocious roar, sprang!

CHAPTER XII

A TERRIFIC BATTLE

BUT even while the beast was in mid-air, a great yellow body came hurtling over the underbrush and struck the jaguar almost at right angles.

The impact was terrible, and the two brutes went down in a heap. Snarling and spitting, they scrambled up and faced each other, and the next moment were engaged in a life and death grapple.

The thud of the collision had come just as Bomba's bow twanged. The arrow would have found its mark unerringly if the body of the jaguar had not been thrown out of the line of its flight.

Astounded beyond expression, Bomba thought for a moment that two jaguars were doing battle for their prey. But the next moment he recognized in the newcomer Polulu, the great puma, Bomba's chief friend and ally among the jungle folk.

"Polulu!" he gasped in delight. "Good Polulu! He saw that Bomba was in danger and has come to his help."

It was a titanic struggle that was going on before his eyes. Both brutes were among the largest and most powerful of their kind. They rolled over and over, tearing from each other great strips of hide, fighting with teeth and claws, each trying to get a death hold on the other's throat.

Bomba drew as near the antagonists as he could, circling about in an attempt to find a target in the jaguar. But the two beasts were whirling about like a giant pinwheel, first one on top and then the other, and Bomba did not dare use either arrow or machete for fear that he would wound or kill Polulu instead of the jaguar.

But Polulu needed no help to dispose of his enemy. He had no match in the jungle for size and strength, and was rapidly getting the better of the combat when, with a savage roar, a second jaguar, possibly the mate of the first, plunged into the fight.

The newcomer sank its teeth deep into Polulu's flank while at the same time a claw of its hindleg tore a strip of the puma's hide. Polulu turned upon his second assailant and gave him a blow with his great paw that loosened the brute's hold and sent him rolling six feet away. But the jaguar was up in an instant and returned to the attack. At the same time the first jaguar, in-

spired to fresh efforts by the coming of its ally, redoubled the ferocity of its fighting.

The odds were too great. Polulu could have conquered either jaguar alone with comparative ease. But with two attacking him at once, he had no chance.

Such rage swept over Bomba as he had scarcely ever known before. With a yell of encouragement to Polulu, he leaped into the fray, throwing caution to the winds. His only thought was that Polulu, his friend, must not die.

He buried his hand in the thick fur of the second jaguar's neck, and as the beast turned snarling to meet this new attack, raised his machete and, with all his force, drove it downward.

He sensed the bite of the sharp steel on flesh, felt it slip along bone and reach the brain of the beast.

As though lifted by an earthquake, Bomba was hurled from the back of the jaguar upon the ground. With a roar that echoed and re-echoed through the jungle, the stricken brute rose on its hind legs, pawed the air blindly for a moment, and then fell.

Bomba lifted himself, half-dazed, on his elbow and stared at the great cat, a moment before so terrible, now stretched out prone and inert.

Then the lad scrambled to his feet, regained his machete, which had been knocked from his

hand as he withdrew it, and hurried again to the help of Polulu.

But Polulu stood in no need of help. Relieved of the flank attack, he had at last got the hold upon his opponent's throat for which he had been seeking, and in a few moments more the fight was over.

Polulu rose to his feet and sent a roar of triumph through the jungle. But he staggered as he did it, and then he sank down on the ground, panting, too spent and exhausted even to lick his wounds.

Bomba was beside him on the instant, caressing the great brute's shaggy head. The animal's eyes, of late so furious, were now soft with affection, and it tried weakly to lick Bomba's hand.

"Good Polulu!" cried the lad. "Brave Polulu! There is no beast of the jungle so strong as Polulu, the friend of Bomba. He has saved Bomba's life."

The queer friendship between the two had begun some years before when Bomba had found the puma pinned beneath a falling tree that had caught and broken one of its legs. Bomba had been stirred to pity by the animal's plight, had released it from the trap, bound up the broken leg, and nursed the puma, bringing it food and drink until the leg had mended. The brute had sensed his pity and goodness of heart and had

been intensely grateful. By the time it was well again it had grown as fond of Bomba as a dog is of its master.

Again and again they had met in the jungle, and on several occasions, in times of great stress, Bomba had owed his life to the puma's devotion. And now he was once more in the animal's debt.

Bomba saw that the animal was bleeding from a dozen wounds, many of them deep, from which the blood was flowing freely. The lad ran to a stream that rippled through the brushwood not far off and brought back water with which he washed the wounds. Then he covered them with river mud, the universal and healing ointment of the jungle. Polulu let him do as he would, purring his gratitude and rubbing his head against the lad's body.

Then, having done all he could to sooth the pain and staunch the bleeding, Bomba offered Polulu food and drink. But though the beast drank avidly of the cool water, he would not touch the food.

Bomba's own supplies were running low now, and he saw in the dead jaguars a chance to replenish them. Jaguar meat was not exactly the kind of food that would please an epicure, but it was eatable, and the opportunity could not be neglected. The lad cut great steaks from the bodies, built a fire and roasted them. Then he ate

to repletion and stored what was left away in his pouch for future needs. By this time Polulu was so far recovered that he was ready to join in the feast.

Bomba patted the great brute on the head and intertwined his fingers in the shaggy mane.

"Bomba is glad that Polulu is strong again," the lad said. "Now Polulu can go back to his mate and tell her how he came to the help of Bomba when the jaguars were hungry for his life. If he had lost his life, Bomba would have grieved for Polulu. Bomba will never forget his friend. But now Bomba must go on, for he has lost much time."

The puma whined, pressed against him, and looked up into his face as though beseeching that he might go with him.

But Bomba shook his head sadly.

"Where Bomba goes he must go alone," he said. "The man he goes to see would be afraid if he saw Polulu, and would tell his people to kill him. Then Bomba's heart would be heavy. No, Polulu cannot go. But Bomba will come back, if it is so decreed, and then he will talk and feast with Polulu again."

He pointed back in the direction from which Polulu had come, and the brute reluctantly obeyed. Bomba listened until the padding of the animal's feet had died away and then once more

turned his face and steps toward Jaguar Island.

He had been warned by the attack of the jaguar that he must now be doubly on his guard. He realized that, whereas the big cats usually hesitated to attack unless they themselves were attacked or were sorely pressed by hunger, here in this desolate region they would assail him boldly, fearlessly, knowing little of man and his strange powers.

The forces of the jungle would now be unleashed upon him, and in the matter of mere physical strength they were stronger than he was. From now on he must pit his wit against brute strength, trusting to his keen brain to win against odds that would otherwise be overwhelming.

So, though he stepped swiftly, he stepped softly, constantly on the alert, bow and arrows, machete and revolver ready at hand in case of need, eyes searching out every moving shadow in the underbrush.

Before long his supply of meat was exhausted, for he had had to eat freely to maintain his strength. He hated to devote any more time to hunting than he had to, for it meant that much delay in his journey. Berries and nuts and turtle eggs helped to eke out his supplies, but he needed meat.

Luck was with him, for he killed a tapir, and this time he cured enough of the meat to last

him, by his calculations, until he could reach the island of Japazy. Now with his larder stocked, he could devote himself solely to the one end he had in view.

His conviction never faltered that once he came face to face with the half-breed he would be able to get from him the knowledge he craved, provided that Japazy had that knowledge. The possibility of a hostile reception occurred to him at times, but he dismissed it promptly. Why should such a natural and simple request arouse Japazy's ire? Jojasta had told him something. Sobrinini had told him more. Why should not Japazy scatter the last shred of mystery that hung about the secret of his birth?

Musing thus, he was pushing his way through an unusually thick part of the jungle late on the third afternoon after he had left Polulu when he stopped abruptly.

A scream had halted him, a man's scream, the scream of one in mortal agony!

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE BOA CONSTRICTOR'S FOLDS

UNDER other circumstances Bomba might have hesitated before he rushed to the spot from which that scream proceeded. He would have feared a decoy, a trap. But there was such genuine terror, such awful anguish in that blood-curdling shriek that he hurried with all the speed he could muster, unslinging his bow as he ran.

In a moment he had reached a little opening in the jungle, and his blood ran cold at the sight that met his eyes.

A man, by his color an Indian, was struggling in the coils of a giant boa constrictor. His features were distorted with agony. The coils of the great snake were wound about the man's right arm and striving to crush it into pulp.

The victim was tearing wildly at the snake's body with the free arm, but as the hand held no weapon it could make no impression. Another man was circling frantically about the reptile, trying to get in a blow with a knife. But he could not get near enough to slash, as the boa's head,

reared aloft, struck viciously at him whenever he came almost within reaching distance.

Had the snake retained a hold by its tail from the bough from which it had dropped upon its prey, the struggle would have long since been over. But the reptile had made two mistakes.

It had missed the body that it sought to enfold and, instead, had encircled the arm. And in the struggle it had lost the grip of its tail upon the bough above and had come floundering to the earth.

Now the great body was lashing wildly about, the tail seeking a stump or a tree trunk on which it could get a grip. With this for purchase, it could crush its victim instantly, draw the body into its coils, squeeze it into a shapeless mass, and then devour it at leisure.

Bomba sensed the situation in an instant. There was not a second to lose. Already the snake's tail was brushing the trunk of a tree and, feeling the contact, it was pulling its victim in the required direction.

Bomba's first thought was of his machete. With that he might sever the reptile's spine and render it helpless. But he dismissed this at once. He could not get near enough.

Like a flash he raised his bow to his shoulder. He shouted, and the reptile reared its head and

hissed at him viciously. That moment was enough to give Bomba the target he needed.

The bow twanged and the arrow transfixed that hideous head.

There was a fearful hissing and thrashing, the coils fell apart, and the body of the reptile dropped to the ground. There it floundered about for a minute or two and then lay motionless.

The man who had so narrowly escaped a horrible death had fallen to the earth and lay there in a crumpled heap.

Bomba jumped to his side, lifted the man's head and supported it on his knees.

At the same instant the man's companion sprang to offer a similar service, and he and Bomba came face to face.

There was a gasp of astonished recognition.

"Bomba!"

"Neram!"

Bomba found himself looking into the eyes of Neram, one of the two slaves he had rescued from the tyranny of Jojasta on his memorable visit to the Moving Mountain.

The delight of Neram at the meeting was unbounded, and that of Bomba was scarcely less great.

Following Bomba's rescue of Sobrinini, the ex-slaves had begged to be permitted to go with him

to Pipina's cabin. Bomba had assented, and they had proved of great value in replenishing the food supplies of the little household as well as in helping Pipina take care of Casson and Sobrinini.

Later on, when the half-demented old woman had wandered away into the jungle, Bomba had sent Ashati and Neram to hunt for her, as they were skilled in all the lore of the jungle. They had gone on their search reluctantly, as they had a superstitious fear of Sobrinini, whom they regarded as a witch. Weeks passed by and lengthened into months with no word either of Sobrinini or of the ex-slaves. Bomba had reluctantly come to the conclusion that they had perished. And now, in this most unexpected manner, he had come upon them again!

There was little time at present for explanations, for Ashati demanded all their attention. The man had fainted from fright and pain. Neram ran to get some water, while Bomba chafed his wrists and slapped his face.

It was not long before, under these ministrations, Ashati opened his eyes. An expression of panic came over his features as memory returned to him.

"The snake! The big snake!" he shrieked.

"He is dead," replied Neram. "He will hurt Ashati no more. Bomba has killed him.

"Bomba?" exclaimed Ashati excitedly.

He turned his head from Neram, and as his gaze fell upon Bomba such a look of rapturous delight and doglike devotion came into his eyes that the lad's heart was touched.

"Yes, Bomba is here," said the jungle boy, as he put his hand affectionately on Ashati's head. "Bomba heard Ashati scream and he came to his help. But now Ashati must let Bomba see his arm where the big snake held him."

The lad examined with care the man's arm, which was black to the shoulder and swollen to nearly double its usual size. But to his relief he established that the bone was not broken. If the snake had been able to get a tail hold the bone would have been snapped like a pipe stem.

Bomba and Neram bathed the arm and applied a plaster of river mud. Then they propped the man as comfortably as they could against the back of a tree, first making a careful examination of the branches to see that no other monster lurked above.

"Bomba is great," murmured the grateful sufferer, as he looked with a shudder at the hideous body of the dead snake. "Bomba is good. There is no one so brave as Bomba in the jungle. And none can shoot as straight and kill as quickly."

"Bomba is glad that he came in time," returned the lad gravely. "But his arrow would have done no good if the snake had got its tail

around a tree. It was a foolish snake to let go of the bough. But how is it that Ashati did not see that the snake was in the tree?"

"Ashati had looked," returned the man; "but some demon must have blinded his eyes, for he saw nothing. He was bending over to get some wood for a fire when the big snake dropped and wound itself about his arm."

"Neram tried to help Ashati," broke in Neram. "But he could not get close with his knife. And Neram did not dare shoot his arrow for fear he would kill Ashati. Neram cannot shoot as straight as Bomba."

"The gods have been good," returned Bomba. "The big snake is dead. We will eat of its flesh, for it is good. Neram will make a fire and we will feast. Then Ashati and Neram will tell Bomba where they have been and what they have done since they left the cabin of Pipina."

In a short time the fire was blazing and the choicest portions of the snake were being roasted. They ate in silence, as is the custom of the people of the jungle, and it was only when their appetites were fully satisfied that Bomba spoke.

"Tell Bomba now," he commanded, "where have been the comings and goings of Ashati and Neram since they left the cabin of the good squaw Pipina. They went to look for Sobrinini. Did they find her?"

"Neram and Ashati did not find her," replied the former. "There was no sign of Sobrinini in the jungle. There were no footprints. She must have melted into air. She could have done this, for she was a witch."

"She was a witch," echoed Ashati, making a cabalistic sign to ward off evil spirits.

"Ashati and Neram talk foolish words," replied Bomba impatiently. "There is no such thing as a witch."

The ex-slaves were silent but by no means convinced. Superstition was woven into the very warp and woof of their natures.

"If Ashati and Neram could not find Sobrinini," went on Bomba, after a moment of meditation, "why did they not come back to the cabin of Pipina and tell Bomba?"

"They wanted to come," replied Neram, "but Neram was taken sick with fever in the jungle, and it was many weeks before he was strong enough to walk. And then Ashati's leg was hurt in a fight with a jaguar that he killed. Ashati and Neram are on their way now to Pipina's cabin. And Bomba will go with us. That is good."

"No, Bomba will not go," replied the lad. "He is going on a long journey. And Ashati and Neram will not find the cabin of Pipina. It is gone."

"Gone?" his hearers exclaimed simultaneously.

"Yes," returned Bomba. "The headhunters burned it with fire."

"The headhunters!" cried Neram, a shudder going through him at the mention of the dread name.

"May the curse of the gods rest upon them!" growled Ashati.

"And the good Casson? And Pipina?" asked Neram anxiously. "Are they hurt? Did the headhunters carry them away?"

"No," replied Bomba. "Pipina got away, and Bomba has taken her to the camp of the good chief, Hondura. But Casson wandered away into the jungle. Bomba has looked hard for him, but could not find him. Now the bucks of Hondura are looking for Casson.

"Now listen well to the words of Bomba," he continued. "Ashati and Neram will go to the maloca of Hondura. They are good hunters, and the chief will be glad to have them among his bucks. They will tell Hondura that Bomba has sent them and that they will hunt for Casson and make their home with Hondura till Bomba gets back."

"Neram and Ashati will do what Bomba says," returned the former. "But Bomba speaks of a long journey. Where is it that Bomba goes?"

"Bomba goes to see Japazy, the half-breed, who lives on Jaguar Island," the lad replied.

The ex-slaves shuddered at Bomba's words. Their features became livid with fear.

"Jaguar Island!" exclaimed Ashati.

"To go to Jaguar Island is death," declared Neram solemnly.

"That is what Neram and Ashati said before when Bomba went to the island of snakes to find Sobrinini," replied the lad. "But Bomba did not die."

"To go to Jaguar Island is death," repeated Neram stubbornly.

"They are foolish words that Neram speaks," said Bomba. "There is death in many places, and Bomba has faced it often. He will face it again, if it is at Jaguar Island. But why is Neram so afraid that his blood is like water in his veins? Is it because of the jaguars? Bomba has his bow and his machete."

"The arrow is swift and the knife is sharp," murmured Neram in a singsong voice. "But there are things that the arrow cannot pierce and the knife cannot bite."

"What things?" asked Bomba, with a tinge of skepticism in his tone.

"Ghosts," said Neram.

"Demons," added Ashati.

Despite himself, Bomba was impressed by the utter conviction expressed by the two. This was what Hondura had said. Was there indeed some

foundation for the dread that seemed to seize everybody at the mention of Jaguar Island?

"Bomba has never seen a ghost or a demon," the lad said, with an attempt at lightness.

"But they have seen him," returned Ashati, with a shiver. "Perhaps they are looking at Bomba now."

The eyes of the ex-slaves glanced about affrightedly at the darkening shadows of the jungle and Bomba felt as though cold water were trickling down his spine.

"If there are ghosts and demons there, how is it that Japazy still lives?" he objected.

"Because he is a man of magic," replied Neram. "He is more powerful even than was Jojasta."

"He is the lord of ghosts and demons," declared Ashati. "They do his bidding."

Again that chill ran along Bomba's spine.

What was it that Neram had said?

"Things that the arrow cannot pierce and the knife cannot bite!"

CHAPTER XIV

EYES THAT GLARED

WITH an exclamation of impatience, Bomba broke the spell that was stealing over him and leaped to his feet.

"Bomba will go!" he cried, and his vibrant voice rang out like a challenge through the jungle. "Is Bomba a woman to listen to such things and tremble? Shall he whimper as the monkey whimpers when he hears the roar of the jaguar? No! Bomba will go. He will face the jaguars. He will face the ghosts. He will face the demons. Bomba has spoken!"

Ashati gave vent to a wailing cry and Neram covered his face with his hands. In their superstitious fancy Bomba was already as good as dead.

"Bomba is brave," Ashati moaned, "but it is not well to brave the things that come from another world."

"Bomba's life is his own," returned the lad. "He does with it as he wills. He would rather die than have it said that Bomba was afraid."

There was silence for a time following his declaration. The ex-slaves were wrapped in gloom. They loved Bomba, and would have given their lives for him. But they knew the boy well enough to be sure that he would not recede an inch from the plan that he had formed.

Bomba himself was thinking deeply. It had been in his mind to ask Ashati and Neram to accompany him. The loneliness of his days and nights was wearing upon him. It would be good to have companionship, some one to whom he could talk at times and unburden his heart. Then, too, Ashati and Neram were skilled in woodcraft and could be of service to him in this wild and unknown part of the country.

But he dismissed the thought almost as soon as it came to him. He did not want to drag them into danger. It was his own personal errand on which he was going, and he himself must face all that was involved in it. He knew that they would go if he asked them, even though they felt sure that they were going to their death. There was no limit to their devotion. But he would not accept the sacrifice.

Something of what he was thinking must have been felt by them, for Ashati came to him, prostrated himself on the ground and put Bomba's foot upon his neck.

"Ashatis will go with Bomba," he said.

"Bomba is Ashati's chief. Twice he has saved Ashati's life. His life belongs to Bomba."

"Yes," put in Neram, "we will follow Bomba even to the land of ghosts and demons."

The lad was profoundly touched, for he knew that each believed that he was signing his own death warrant.

"Ashati and Neram are good, and Bomba will not forget," he said. "But where Bomba goes he must go alone. And now Bomba has spoken, and there is no need for more words about his going. But it may be that Ashati and Neram can tell Bomba some good words about the trail and what he must do to get to Jaguar Island when he reaches the great water."

"Ashati and Neram have never been in that part of the jungle," said the latter. "But they have heard about it from the old men of the tribe. It is two days' journey beyond the Giant Cataract that Bomba must go before he reaches the great water. Then he must get a canoe or a raft and let the water carry him where it will. He will not need a paddle, except to steer, for the water is very strong and it will carry him until he touches Jaguar Island."

Again a shudder stole through Neram as he mentioned that sinister name.

Ashati added further details of the journey, and by the time the conference was finished Bomba

had gained a great deal of information that would be of service to him.

"It is well," said the lad. "And now it is time that we sleep, for Bomba must start as soon as the sun comes up in the sky. We will gather wood and make a great fire to make the beasts afraid, and then we shall rest."

He proposed that they should take turns in watching, lest the fire should go down. But Neram would not hear of this. That much at least he could do for his master. He would watch through the whole night so that Bomba could get the rest he needed for the task that lay before him. And finding that Neram was so much in earnest, Bomba did not protest.

The boy slept as soon as his head touched the ground, and did not wake till he felt Neram's hand upon his shoulder at the first streak of dawn.

The faithful ex-slave had composed a savory stew, and they all ate heartily. Ashati's arm, though still painful, was much better, and a great deal of the swelling had gone down.

"And now," said Bomba, as he made a last examination of his weapons, "it is time for Bomba to go. He will think often of Ashati and Neram and will be glad that they are in the maloca of the good chief Hondura. They will be good to Pipina and bring her much meat. And they will

try to find Casson. If they do find him, Bomba's heart will be more glad than it has been for many moons."

"Neram and Ashati will do what they can to find Casson," promised the former.

"And they will give much meat to the medicine man so that he may pray to his gods for Bomba," added Ashati.

With a last wave of the hand, Bomba left them, and they stood looking after him until the jungle swallowed him up. Then, with heavy hearts, they took the backward trail to Hondura's camp.

Bomba went on at a good rate of speed. The sound sleep that he had enjoyed had recuperated him immensely. Thanks, too, to the explicit information he had got from the ex-slaves, he now moved with more certainty directly toward his goal.

He grieved for Sobrinini, for, though he had no deep affection for the old woman, she had been kind to him. Then, too, she had been a sort of slender link between him and the parents he had never known well enough to remember. Sobrinini had known them and had sought to tell Bomba about them, but the twist in her poor brain had made it impossible. She had, however, given him the clue to Japazy as possessing the knowledge he sought, and for this Bomba was grateful.

Much more than for Sobrinini did he sorrow for Casson. Dear old Casson had been a part of his life. It was hard to think of existence without him. And he had been white, so different from the brown-skinned natives with their ignorance, their superstition, their narrowed lives.

White! That was the most precious word in Bomba's limited vocabulary. For it marked him out as different from the forms of life by which he was surrounded. He wanted to be different. He wanted to be like Gillis and Dorn, the white rubber hunters, the men who laughed and slapped each other on the back. There was little laughter in the jungle. Bomba wanted some companion, some one with whom he could laugh, whom he could slap on the back. Some one like Frank Parkhurst, who had seen so much, who had told him about the great ocean, of mighty cities.

He thought of the promises of the rubber hunters and the Parkhursts that they would come back and take Bomba from the jungle. No doubt they had been sincere enough at the time, but many moons had passed now with no word from them. Perhaps they had been killed by savages or wild beasts before they got back to the coast.

More likely, Bomba thought, with a tinge of bitterness, they had forgotten him.

"After all," he said to himself, "what is Bomba

but a thing of the jungle? They would be ashamed to show him to their white friends. And yet that thing of the jungle saved their lives. Bomba's knife was good when they needed it. Bomba's arrows were good. But now they have forgotten him as the jungle forgets the mists after the sun has risen."

But into these gloomy ponderings shot a gleam of hope. Japazy still was left! He might tell him of his parents, who they were and where they lived. If he did, Bomba would search out those parents, even if they were at the other end of the world. How glad he would be to see them! And how glad they would be to see him!

But would they be glad? Or would they, too, be ashamed of Bomba, the boy of the jungle, the boy of the puma skin, the boy who tore his food with his fingers when he ate, the boy who had shyly watched Gillis and Dorn at their meals and wished that he could eat as they did.

But no! That lovely woman who had smiled down at him from the picture in the hut of Sobrinini, if she were indeed his mother, would not be ashamed of Bomba. She would gather him to her heart. She would kiss him, as the woman with the golden hair had kissed him when he had saved her from the headhunters of Nascanora.

For some time past, as he journeyed on engrossed in thought, Bomba had been conscious

of a rumbling in the distance. It was so far away that he had paid little attention to it. Now it had grown louder, and it forced itself upon his attention.

Was it thunder? The sky was azure and the sun was shining with dazzling brilliance. The sound could not be thunder.

Then the truth broke upon Bomba. It was the roar of the Giant Cataract!

That mighty body of water was miles and miles away, but the sound carried far in the clear air.

Bomba was perhaps twenty miles to the left of it. Now he hastened to make the distance still greater. For at the Giant Cataract was the village of Nascanora, he whose nose Bomba had crushed, he who was reserving a special place on the top of his wigwam for the head of the jungle boy who had shamed him before his followers and defied him.

Bomba described a wide semicircle that would bring him to the river he sought many miles above the Giant Cataract. He had little fear of meeting any headhunters in the district toward which he was heading, for they were probably imbued with same superstitious fear of Japazy and Jaguar Island that had possessed Ashati and Neram, and would give the region a wide berth. Still, it was well to take no chances, and he drove from

his mind for the moment all thoughts of his parentage and devoted himself strictly to the matter in hand.

By the evening of the next day, he figured, he would reach the river bank. Then he would make his raft and launch himself into the unknown. The strong current of the river would carry him along to Jaguar Island.

To what else? To the knowledge that he craved? Or to death?

If the former, he would be supremely happy. If the latter—well, Bomba had known how to live. He would know how to die.

As the shades of night were drawing on he came to an old ramshackle native hut, long since abandoned. There was no door. Only the four walls were standing, and they were bending crazily.

Even at that, however, it offered more protection than that to which the lad had been accustomed. He could build a big fire before the door of the hut. That would protect him on one side, and the walls would shelter him on the other three sides from the incursions of serpents and wild beasts.

He had had a hard, exhausting day and was very tired. He built his fire, brought water from a little stream near at hand, made a native tea from bitter leaves he gathered and feasted

heartily upon the tapir meat, of which he had yet a considerable store on hand.

Then he lay down to sleep on the earthen floor of the hut. His tired eyes closed almost instantly.

How long he slept he did not know. But he was awakened at last by a queer sensation, as though he were rocking up and down in a canoe.

His first thought was of earthquake. It was a common enough occurrence in that district, which had once abounded in volcanoes, most of them now extinct.

But there was no roar or rumbling, such as usually accompanied a quake. There was no sound save the usual buzz and hum of the jungle.

Bomba sprang to his feet, every sense on the alert.

Beneath the place where he had been lying the earthen floor was heaving like the waves.

Then it broke apart, and from the shattered opening rose a great head whose open jaws were armed with terrible rows of teeth.

Bomba looked into the fiery eyes of a monster alligator!

CHAPTER XV

THE RUSHING RIVER

For a moment the lad stood as though turned into stone, astounded and appalled. Then he realized what had happened.

The alligator, following a custom of its kind, had buried itself in the soft mud, on the same principle that a bear hibernates in winter. Probably a flood some time before had inundated the district and the alligator had come with it. When the flood receded the alligator had remained in its self-imposed burial place. The soft mud had caked and hardened, but still the alligator slept on.

The weight and warmth of the boy's body had aroused it, and now it was issuing forth to renew once more its active life.

For a moment the great brute seemed as much surprised as the lad himself, and looked stupidly at the invader of its retreat.

But only for a moment. Then a hideous bellow issued from its open jaws, its fiery eyes snapped with malignity, and it made a lunge at the jungle boy.

But the lunge was an instant too late.

For Bomba had shaken off the paralysis that the sight of the monster had brought upon him, and with one bound had cleared the doorway, leaping high over the fire that blazed in front of the hut.

With speed incredible in so clumsy a creature, the alligator pursued him. But it could not leap like Bomba, and with the torpor of its long sleep confusing it and the light of the fire blinding it, plunged headlong into the flames.

There was a tremendous bellowing and thrashing about, a scattering of the embers in every direction, and then the half-blinded creature lumbered out and made for the jungle, forgetting in its own pain and bewilderment all about its human enemy.

Bomba had not the slightest desire to hinder its going. He probably could have slain it with one of his arrows, but he forbore, glad enough to be rid so suddenly of an awful problem.

But there was no more sleep for him that night. He had been too thoroughly shaken. He made up the fire again and sat down beside it, keeping a careful watch lest the monster, still lurking in the vicinity, should return to take vengeance on the author of its misadventure.

But nothing happened during the remainder of the night, and at the first streak of dawn Bomba

made a hasty breakfast and set out once more on the trail.

The jungle thinned as he went on, and he was able to make such rapid progress that it was only a little after noon when he reached the banks of the great river in which somewhere was Jaguar Island.

It was a black, ominous stream, with a current that ran like a mill-race. At intervals along its length were foaming rapids that made navigation extremely perilous. Islands dotted its expanse here and there, but none of these within Bomba's sight were of any great size.

Where Bomba stood the river was about half a mile in width, but a little further down it expanded to more than twice that width. Great trees fringed the banks, the foliage reaching far out over the water.

Bomba hunted the banks for a long distance on the chance that he might find the canoe of some Indian, either abandoned or hidden in the sedge grass near the shore. He was an expert in navigating that type of craft, and would have felt much safer in it than on a raft that would be wholly at the mercy of the torrent.

But, search as he would, he could find no craft of any sort, and when he had fully convinced himself that there was no other alternative, he set to work to build his raft.

There were plenty of fallen trees and broken branches that had been victims of one of the storms that had swept the jungle, and the boy had little difficulty in getting enough of the right size and shape of logs to make the raft he had in mind. It was not to be an elaborate structure, but it must be strong, for upon its stability his life might depend.

He had no implements of any kind, except his machete. He had no nails or hammer with which to fasten a flooring to the logs to hold them together. But there was an abundance of withes and creepers that, twisted together, were as strong as any rope, and these he wound about the logs in such a way that they could not break loose from one another.

It did not add to his peace of mind to note from time to time an alligator's body break the water. Sometimes they sank again after a lazy glance. More often they swam around sluggishly, watching Bomba with their little eyes as though calculating how long it would be before he could be depended on to furnish them a meal. It was evident that the river was fairly swarming with the terrible creatures.

But these were foes that could be reckoned with, foes that were not immune from arrow and knife. They were different from ghosts and demons, those vague, shadowy, yet awful things

of which Hondura, Neram and Ashati had spoken.

Were there any such things? Bomba did not believe there were. Still, he would have given a great deal to have been perfectly sure on that point. And almost involuntarily at times his eyes would wander to the surrounding jungle.

After two days' labor his work was done, and he surveyed it with satisfaction. It was as nearly square as he could make it and sufficiently large so that it would not easily overturn. In addition to the raft, he had shaped a rough paddle for his steering and a long pole to work the raft loose, if it grounded in a shallow.

He had been working close to the edge of the bank, and when the raft was completed he pushed it over into the water. Then he jumped on board and, standing near the front with the paddle in his hand, committed himself to the mercy of the current.

It was late in the afternoon when he started, so late, in fact, that he was almost tempted to wait till the following morning. But now that he was so near the completion of his journey the urge in him to hurry was too strong to be resisted.

The moon was full and would rise early, and from this he would get all the light he needed.

The current was stronger than he had thought, and the clumsy raft was borne along upon the

surface at a surprising rate of speed. At times it was caught in a cross-current and whirled about, and Bomba had all he could do to keep his balance. And it was extremely desirable that he should keep his balance. It would not do to be thrown into the water.

For Bomba had not started alone. A grim retinue accompanied him. As he had conjectured, the river was alive with caymans. Some were swimming along behind him, their greedy eyes fixed unblinkingly upon the daring young voyager. Others came to the surface as his raft was carried along and joined in the procession. Once let Bomba get in the water, and he would be torn to pieces in a twinkling.

No one knew this better than the lad himself, and every nerve in his body was at its extreme tension.

Not only from his foes in the water was he in danger. At times the current swept him in so close to the shore that he passed under the branches of the overhanging trees. These, too, he had to scan, lest any innocent looking bough should suddenly come to life and prove to be the body of an anaconda ready to dart down like lightning upon its prey.

Once he came to a rapids where the churning water made all attempts to steer impossible, and his raft was tossed about like a chip. One sud-

den heave threw Bomba to the floor of the raft, and he all but slid into the water. But he caught his hands in the crevices of the logs and held on for dear life.

And now he noted that the alligators were closing in upon him. They were growing impatient. Hitherto, they had been content to follow the raft, expecting every moment that the craft would be upset. But as time passed and this did not happen they became more ugly and aggressive.

One of them swam under the raft and then rose suddenly, lifting it on its back, almost upsetting it. The raft rose to a perilous angle, but righted just in time and fell back with a splash into the water.

The ruse had not succeeded, but there was little doubt that it would be repeated, and Bomba concluded that it was time to teach his enemies a lesson.

He selected the largest of the alligators, and, reaching for bow and arrow, took careful aim at one of its eyes. The arrow went straight to the reptile's brain. Its dying flurry churned the water into foam, but before the body could sink half a dozen of its mates were upon it.

In a minute they had torn the body into fragments and the water was red with blood. The monsters sank to the bottom to regale themselves.

The killing of the cayman helped Bomba in

more ways than one. It not only reduced the number of his enemies, but it kept the others busy with the feast that its body provided. Moreover, it taught the brutes that the boy was not as helpless as they had supposed, and they were likely to be a trifle more wary and cautious in future.

While the caymans were disposing of their booty, the swift current had carried Bomba a long distance ahead. His eyes strained through the gathering darkness, but he could see nothing of his former pursuers. He hoped that he had shaken them off.

Vain hope! For in a little while he could see phosphorescent gleams in the water behind him that he knew marked the trails of the caymans.

They were coming again. Their appetite for blood had not been satiated. Rather it had been whetted.

They wanted Bomba! And they were determined to have him!

CHAPTER XVI

JAGUAR ISLAND

DESPITE his iron courage, Bomba could not repress a shudder.

To be sure, he still had his bow and arrows, and what he had done once he might do again.

But now he was handicapped by the darkness. It had come on swiftly. It would be almost half an hour before the moon would rise. And how could he shoot in the darkness at such a tiny target as the eye of the alligator?

For he must kill it there or nowhere. Against the tough, scaly armor that covered the brute from snout to tail, fifty arrows might strike as harmlessly as hail on a roof.

He strained his eyes through the darkness ahead, hoping to see some still blacker blot that might betray the presence of land. He felt that by now he must be somewhere in the vicinity of the island of the big cats. Whatever danger awaited him there, he would face gladly rather than endure the fate that threatened him from the waters in his wake.

Those phosphorescent streaks were drawing closer now. One in particular was not more than twenty feet away.

Then there came a rush, and a huge alligator hurled itself out of the water and came down with half its body on the raft. Its open jaws snapped at Bomba's legs.

Quick as lightning, Bomba grabbed the long pole, and with all the strength of his muscular arms rammed it down the monster's throat.

The brute slid off the raft into the water, and instantly its comrades were on it like a pack of wolves.

Relieved of its burden, the raft righted and swung ahead in the current. A moment later it came up against a jutting point of land with a shock that almost jarred Bomba off his feet.

But he caught hold of an overhanging branch and held the raft steady. Gradually he pulled it in until it grounded on a shelving beach.

Still maintaining his hold on the bough with one hand, Bomba took from around his neck where he had wound it a strong rope of creepers and fastened the raft to the bough so that it could not drift away. Then he leaped to shore.

He threw himself on the ground at full length, panting and exhausted.

Land! To feel the solid earth beneath him after the nightmare of that awful journey through

the seething waters. Now let the alligators rage! He had cheated them on their own element.

But had he cheated them? He must not grow careless. The alligators could travel on land as well as in the water. They were close at hand, and one or more might come creeping up the bank.

So, tired as he was, he got to his feet and made his way cautiously inland until he came to a thorn thicket, into which he burrowed, not without scratches on arms and legs. But what were scratches to one who had escaped the jaws of the caymans?

Was he on Jaguar Island? Or had he struck a smaller island? Ashati and Neram had told him of one that stood in the river two miles above the island of the big cats. Perhaps it was this one on which his raft had grounded.

He need not wait long to know. The moon would soon be up, flooding all the world with light. Then he could make a survey of his surroundings and get his bearings.

In the meantime, rest was unspeakably sweet. The terrific strain under which he had been during that perilous journey down the river had tested his strength and endurance to the uttermost. Now he relaxed.

But he did not sleep. For, if he were not already on Jaguar Island, he still had a trip to

make that night. He had vowed to himself that he would not sleep until he had reached the island where Japazy dwelt. Then only would he lie down to slumber.

Perhaps to the slumber that knows no waking! He knew that, too. But the possibility did not for one moment swerve him from his purpose.

A little while later a faint light came flickering in among the trees. The moon was rising. Bomba waited for a few minutes more and then emerged from his shelter and looked about him.

A little scouting showed him that he was not on Jaguar Island. There was no semblance of human habitation of any kind. The island was only a few acres in extent, and in a little while he had walked all around it.

Once more he would trust himself to the swift turbulent river.

He came to the place where his raft was swinging in the sedge grass near the shore. His eyes scanned the river anxiously. But there were no more of those streaks of phosphorescence in evidence. The alligators had waited for a while perhaps, angry and disappointed, and then returned sullenly to their usual haunts.

To be sure, others might come and take their places, but as Bomba knew that the brutes usually slept at night he did not apprehend much danger on that score.

He unlashed the raft from its mooring and with a hard push of his paddle sent it out from the shore, where it was promptly caught in the grip of the current.

Now he was on the last lap of his journey, the journey that had taken him so many weary days, that had been so full of peril and adventure, and during which his life had so many times seemed to depend upon the turning of a hair.

Was not the very fact that he had been so preserved, Bomba asked himself, a proof that the gods of the Indians, in whom he half believed, were on his side? Surely he could not have come so far only to be mocked at last at the very moment when the end of his mission was in sight.

From these reflections Bomba derived what comfort he could, while his keen eyes scanned the tumbling waters ahead of him and darted from shore to shore.

Presently he became conscious of an odd humming sound, as of the buzzing of innumerable bees. In fact, he thought that a hive might be swarming from one side of the river to the other, and looked to see if he could detect the presence of the insects in the moonlight. Then he remembered that the bees swarmed only in the daytime.

Now the noise took on a deeper note, and with the humming were mingled discordant notes,

rumbling notes, ominous notes, with an occasional crash as of faraway thunder.

Something like this Bomba had heard on his visit to the Moving Mountain. At that time they had been a prelude to a frightful earthquake. Was anything of that kind threatening now?

While he was seeking some solution, his eyes caught sight of a light on the river ahead of him. He thought at first it might be a torch in the canoe of some native. But if that had been so, it would have moved steadily in one direction.

Instead, it leaped about irregularly as though a sport of the wind and waters. Then it disappeared altogether.

Now other lights, some faint, some bright, began to stud the surface of the stream. There were many of them, and they flared up and went out as though at the caprice of a magician. All the time the humming sound persisted.

Bomba began to feel the hair slowly rising on his head. This transcended anything in his experience. He recalled the warnings of Hondura, of Neram and Ashati. Was he entering a realm of spirits, of malignant ghosts and demons? Were they even now laughing in glee as they saw the young voyager coming within their reach?

So engrossed was he in these eerie imaginings that for a moment his vigilant watch of the course he was taking lessened. He was brought to a

rude sense of reality when his raft struck violently on a rock that protruded above the boiling foam of a rapid, so violently that it broke apart, the tough withes that bound it snapped by the force of the impact.

The next moment Bomba found himself struggling in the waters of the river.

He rose to the surface and shook the spray from his eyes. In the churning waters he could see the separated logs of the raft tossing about in wild confusion. He grasped one of them and hung on desperately until the current carried him and his slender support into the comparatively quiet waters beyond.

Then he climbed up on the log and sat on it astride.

His mind was a welter of conflicting thoughts and emotions. In a moment the whole outlook had changed. He had been in comparative safety as long as the raft was beneath his feet. Now he was a mere floating derelict, unable to shape his course, powerless to use his weapons if he were assailed.

The other logs were tossing about in dangerous proximity. At any moment one of them might be hurled against him, breaking a leg or knocking him senseless.

And the caymans!

He looked behind him fearfully. But there

were none of those phosphorescent streaks to betray the presence of the monsters. How long would it be, however, before there would be a break of the water and the emerging of the hideous head of one of the lords of the river!

Sitting astride the log, his legs were hanging in the water. One bite of the alligator's jaws and a leg would be severed as though shorn by shears.

But he was nearing land. That was one comfort. Before him in the moonlight he could see a black mass rapidly taking shape. By its size and general contour, as given him by the ex-slaves, he conjectured that it must be the island of the big cats.

He drifted nearer and nearer to it. Now he was not more than a hundred feet away. Bomba braced himself for the jar that would come when the log struck the shore. Once more he looked behind.

That look almost made his heart stop beating.

He saw a phosphorescent streak!

CHAPTER XVII

THE HIDDEN LISTENER

BOMBA knew all too well what that phosphorescent streak meant. An alligator was coming, and coming fast.

Bomba measured the distance between himself and the shore. The log could move no faster than the current. But Bomba could!

In an instant he had dived into the water and struck out for the shore.

He could swim with amazing speed, and he had never put such power into his strokes as he did now. He knew that he was racing for his life. Would the start he had prove sufficient to bring him to the shore before he was overtaken by his terrible pursuer?

It probably would not have been, if the monster had not stopped for an instant and nosed about the log. It was there its eyes had last descried the boy, for Bomba had been swimming under water since he had slipped off like a shadow.

That moment of puzzlement on the part of the reptile proved the boy's salvation. For by the

time Bomba's almost bursting lungs compelled him to come to the surface for air, he found himself within a few strokes of the shore.

The alligator detected him and put on a tremendous burst of speed. But it was under too great a handicap. Bomba reached the bank and pulled himself up just as the alligator made a snap at him and missed.

Bomba rose to his feet, his heart swelling with jubilation.

But that jubilation was swiftly turned to horror.

As he drew the air into his gasping lungs and turned from the shore, there came a tremendous roar and the lad found himself looking into the fiery eyes of a jaguar crouched for a spring.

There was no time to fit an arrow to the bow, not even time to draw the machete from its sheath, for even as Bomba's startled mind grasped the situation, the beast launched itself into the air.

Like a flash Bomba dropped flat to the ground.

He felt the rush of air as the brute passed over him. The next instant Bomba was on his feet and had drawn his knife, ready for the return attack.

But there was no need. They had been so close to the bank that the spring of the brute had carried it over the edge and into the water. It came up sputtering and strangling and started to scramble up the bank.

Then came a rush, a scream of mortal agony, and the jaguar was struggling in the jaws of the alligator!

The great beast fought desperately, tearing with teeth and claws against the scaly hide of its captor. But the alligator was in its favorite element and had the advantage. Clamping the jaguar in its great jaws, it went down under the surface. There was a churning of the water that rapidly turned red, a few bubbles of air rose to the top, and then the commotion subsided.

The lord of the jungle had met more than his match in the lord of the river!

Scarcely daring to believe in his escape, Bomba watched the turbulent water in a horrid fascination. Two terrible perils, one from the land, one from the water, had vanished almost in the twinkling of an eye.

He had reached his destination. He was on Jaguar Island. He was unscathed. Surely the Indians' gods—or some power higher than his own—must be on his side when one of his enemies was made to destroy the other. The conviction gave him renewed strength and courage.

He found a thorn thicket, forced his way into it, and sat down to take counsel with himself as to his future course.

He had formed no clear idea as yet as to how he would approach Japazy. He had deferred

thinking of that until he should have reached the island.

One thing was certain. He must not seek him at night. In the darkness and the confusion that his unexpected coming might produce it might very well happen that he would be killed before his peaceful intentions could be explained. It was the law of the jungle to shoot first and investigate afterward.

No, he must go in the daylight, with his palms extended outward as a sign of amity and goodwill. Then he would be brought into Japazy's presence and would explain his errand. Then he would listen to the words that would give him the information for which his soul yearned or else doom him once more to heartache and despair.

He looked at the sky and judged the time from the position of the moon. It was not yet midnight. He would have some hours in which to get the rest that he so sorely needed. Then at the first streak of dawn he would be astir, would go scouting cautiously about the island and find out the dwelling place of Japazy and his people. After that he could decide how to approach the half-breed.

The mysterious humming mixed with louder and more discordant notes still persisted. Bomba glanced riverward and saw the flickering lights

dancing weirdly on the surface. What did they mean? What did they forebode?

He looked about the jungle. In the faint moonlight that filtered through the trees the things he saw took on fantastic shapes. The creepers hanging from the trees swayed and writhed and seemed to stretch out ghostly arms. The knots and boles of the trunks framed themselves into grimacing faces that seemed to be chuckling over the fate of the young invader who had come unbidden into their realm.

With an effort Bomba shook himself free from the morbid fancies that were stealing upon him.

"Is Bomba an old woman?" he asked himself scornfully. "Will he be whimpering soon like Pipina, the squaw? No! Bomba does not fear what the natives fear. He does not tremble like Ashati and Neram who talk foolish words about ghosts and demons. For Bomba is white. He is like Gillis and Dorn, who laugh at the talk of ghosts. If they can laugh, so can Bomba. For Bomba has a white skin and he has a white soul, and he is afraid of nothing that the foolish people say walk in the darkness."

Strengthened in his own mind by this defiance, he took food from his pouch and made a hearty meal. Then he burrowed still further into the heart of the thicket, where, knowing that no wild

beast would attempt to get at him, he lay down and slept.

The first faint light of day was creeping up the sky when he awoke. He made a hasty breakfast, and then, after looking closely to the condition of his weapons, set out on his voyage of discovery.

It was not long before he discovered that the island was many acres in extent. Much of it was jungle, almost as thick in places as on the mainland. But it was much easier to traverse, for there were numerous well-beaten trails extending in various directions which attested the presence of quite an island population.

There were sections also on which grew little vegetation. These were sandy and rocky plateaus, seamed with ravines. There was one great hill that almost rose to the dignity of a mountain, and from this a bluish vapor or smoke kept constantly rising and spreading out in the shape of a fan. At times a flash of flame would issue forth from the summit.

In the vicinity of this, Bomba frequently felt slight tremors of the earth, one of them so pronounced that it nearly threw him from his feet. And the humming was much louder here than it had been when Bomba was on the river.

Bomba knew that he was in a volcanic region, and the discovery did not contribute to his peace of mind. The terrible scenes that had attended

the eruption of the Moving Mountain and the earthquake that had accompanied it were still too fresh in his memory not to stir him unpleasantly in retrospect.

At almost every moment Bomba expected to come upon some hut or village in the jungle. From the inhabitants of these, he had planned to get information as to the village or town in which Japazy dwelt. But though he saw once in a while some ramshackle cabin, it proved invariably to be deserted. In some places the lush vegetation of the jungle had almost overgrown the hut. No beaten path led to the door. Not the rudest of native furniture was within.

After two or three experiences of this kind Bomba grasped the situation. The jaguars that had given the island its name must abound in such numbers that no solitary dweller in the jungle would be safe. Probably every one of these deserted cabins had been the scene of a tragedy. Undoubtedly the inhabitants had had to gather into one town for mutual protection.

Bomba thanked his stars that it was daylight and that most of the nocturnal prowlers had retired to their dens where they would sleep the day away in preparation for the next foray. But all the same, there might be one or more about, and he kept a vigilant eye upon every tree and thicket.

He had searched about for perhaps three hours when he heard the twang of a bow string. With it was blended a roar of rage and pain. Then followed an excited babbling of voices.

The sound had come from the further side of a group of rocks that seemed to have been thrown about in confusion by some convulsion of nature. They were not more than fifty yards away.

With the speed and at the same time the stealthiness of a panther, Bomba glided to the biggest group of bowlders. He squeezed himself in a crevice between two of them.

Now he could hear the voices of two natives talking vociferously.

CHAPTER XVIII

DISCOVERED

BOMBA edged himself still further between the bowlders until he found a place where he could look through without himself being seen.

At once he saw the reason of the excitement.

A dead jaguar lay stretched out on the ground. One arrow protruded from its side. Another was imbedded in its throat.

Two natives were inspecting it and gloating over their kill. They were vigorous and stalwart specimens, somewhat above the usual size of jungle dwellers. Their faces were savage, but not so brutish as those of the headhunters of Nascanora. They were unclothed, save for the customary breech clout. On their broad breasts was painted a tribal emblem that Bomba had never seen, and a band about the forehead of each held a cluster of nodding plumes.

While the language in which they spoke had some words that were unfamiliar to Bomba, he was so well versed in most of the dialects of the jungle, which differ little, that he had no trouble in understanding what they were saying.

"The aim of Sunka is true," boasted one, as he bent over the dead beast and proceeded, with the aid of his knife to get the arrow from its throat.

"No truer than that of Boshot," retorted the other, as he sought to reclaim his arrow from the body. "See how it went through from side to side!"

"The jaguar is brave, but he is not so brave as the fighting men of Japazy," went on Sunka, as he examined his arrow, dried it and returned it to his quiver.

"His leap is as the lightning, but when the arrow sings he falls," added Boshot. "I see Olura, Tama and Abino coming," he went on, as he looked toward a trail at his right.

"They have heard the jaguar roar and they come to help," declared Sunka. "But there is no need of help when Sunka and Boshot have fitted their arrows to the string."

It was in this self-congratulatory mood that the victors welcomed the three newcomers whom Bomba could now see issuing from the jungle path.

There were loud cries of satisfaction as the trio discovered the dead body of the jaguar.

"Japazy will be glad when he sees its head!" exclaimed Olura, as he surveyed the animal.

"Whose arrow killed it?" asked Tama.

"Mine," declared Sunka proudly.

"Mine," stated Boshot with equal conviction.

They glared at each other in defiance, and their hands involuntarily gripped more tightly the spears that they carried in addition to their bows and arrows.

"There is no need of bad blood and hot words between Sunka and Boshot," intervened Abino, who seemed to be much older than the others and something of a diplomat. "All Japazy's people know how brave they are. What matter which arrow did the killing? Neither might have done so without the other. Japazy will be pleased with Sunka and Boshot. But his eyes will shoot lightning at either one, if he fight with the other."

"That is true," put in Tama. "There are too few of our people now since the plague came some moons ago. That plague carried many to the place of the dead. The tribe needs all its fighting men to kill jaguars and not to kill each other."

The hands of the would-be combatants loosened from their spears and their anger disappeared. Bomba guessed that the most potent argument had been the mention of the lightning that would flash from Japazy's eyes. It was evident from the reverence with which they pronounced the name of the chief that they held him in awe.

"The jaguar is dead, and that is good," said Abino. "But there are still many left. We kill

many, but more come. And there are cubs in the caves that will soon be big enough to carry off the children of the tribe."

"Yes," agreed Olura, with despondency in his tone. "Two more were carried off last week. The medicine men make prayers, but still the jaguars come."

"They come from the other shore," observed Abino. "They swim the river in the night when the caymans are asleep. There are herbs on the island that they like, that make them laugh when they are sad, that make them well when they are sick."

Bomba guessed that they referred to a kind of catnip that he had already noted growing on the island in great profusion. He wondered that the natives had not torn these up by the roots, so as to make the place less alluring to the unwelcome visitors. Then, realizing the rank and rapid growth of the vegetation, he knew that nothing less than an army could accomplish the colossal task.

"It would be well if Japazy would take his people to the other side of the river where the jaguars are not so many and where the tribe could dwell in peace," remarked Boshot.

"Beware, Boshot," warned Abino, looking fearfully about him. "Remember you not Manasta, he of the bold and forward tongue? He

said one day to Japazy the words that just now came from Boshot's mouth. Japazy looked at him and his frown was terrible. And Manasta has not been seen since that day."

"That is true," put in Tama, in an awed voice. "It is said that Japazy had him tied and put in a bag and thrown into the river to the caymans. So beware, Boshot. They are good words that Abino has spoken to Boshot."

The doughty warrior, who had not quailed before the charge of the jaguar, seemed to shrink into himself, and Bomba had a new glimpse into the ruthless character with whom he was soon to deal.

"Now let us skin the jaguar and get his meat," suggested Olura. "There is but little food in the huts of our people, and they will be glad and make a feast when they see us bringing them the meat of the jaguar."

They were preparing to carry out the suggestion when there was a sharp report. A burst of flame sprang out of the mountain's top, and the earth shook so violently that all of the natives measured their length upon the ground. Bomba would have been thrown also, had it not been for the rocks on either side. As it was, he was knocked about until he was bruised and sore.

The natives scrambled to their knees and bowed their heads to the ground, making caba-

listic signs and uttering entreaties either to the mountain or their gods.

The trembling of the earth persisted for several minutes and then subsided. But it was some time before the natives had so far recovered from their fright as to set about resuming the skinning and cutting up of the dead jaguar.

"Tamura is angry," murmured Abino, looking up fearfully at the mountain peak, from which smoke and flame were still issuing. "We must make him gifts, many gifts, so that he may smile again upon our people."

"We will give some of this meat to the medicine man so that he may make a burnt offering," suggested Tama. "Else the lava floods may come and roll over the dwelling place of the tribe."

As though to accentuate this possibility, there came another shock more violent than the one before.

The rocks between which Bomba was standing were pulled apart as though by giant hands, and to the startled eyes of the Indians Bomba stood revealed!

CHAPTER XIX

IN THE HANDS OF THE TRIBE

THE effect created by the sudden appearance of Bomba was startling.

For a moment the savages gaped at him in stupefaction, eyes bulging, jaws dropped. Then some of them raised their spears and others hastily fitted arrows to their bows.

Bomba had been almost as disconcerted by his sudden betrayal as the natives themselves. But now, as steadily as the tremulous motion of the earth would permit, he stepped boldly out of his former hiding place with hands up and palms extended, as a token that he came in amity and goodwill.

The sign was one that was understood by all tribes that dwelt in the jungle, and the threatening motions ceased. Spears and bows were lowered and the natives stood looking at him in wonder. His bronzed skin was almost as dark as theirs, but they knew by his features that he belonged to a different race.

Not a word was uttered until Abino, who

seemed to be the spokesman of the group, took a step forward.

"Who is the stranger?" he asked. "Why has he come to the island of Japazy?"

"It is Bomba who speaks," replied the lad. "He comes from a far part of the jungle and he would speak to Japazy, your chief. He comes in peace. His heart is clean and he does not speak in forked words."

"It is well that the stranger comes in peace," returned Abino, "for the spears of Japazy's fighting men are sharp and their arrows sing with joy when they sink into the heart of an enemy."

"Huh!" grunted Boshot. "The men of Japazy would not waste an arrow on a boy."

The slur stung Bomba, but he knew the importance of keeping his temper, and no change of expression was visible in his face. Still, he thought it might be just as well to let them know at the outset that though he was a boy he was no weakling.

"Bomba is but a boy," he admitted, with an ingratiating smile. "But Bomba has the muscles of a man. He will show you."

He walked up to the dead jaguar, put his arm under it, and with one mighty heave threw it over his shoulder.

There were excited exclamations among the Indians, and they shrank back, looking at Bomba

in awe. Not one of them, despite their size, could have performed the feat so easily, if at all.

"The stranger is strong," admitted Abino, and Boshot looked rather sheepish because of his slighting remark.

Bomba noted the impression that had been produced and thought it an opportune time to deepen it still further.

"Bomba is no weakling," he said; "but the weapons he carries with him are stronger than Bomba. His arrows go far and they go straight. They find the eye of the cayman and the heart of the jaguar."

"The stranger speaks big words," retorted Sunka skeptically.

Bomba looked about him. At a distance of two hundred feet was a high tree, on the topmost branch of which a buzzard was preening itself.

"The buzzard is far away," he said, as he fitted an arrow to his string, "but he will fall when Bomba lets go the string."

There were grunts of incredulity mingled with curiosity. This stranger was giving them thrills to which they were unaccustomed.

"Shall Bomba's arrow strike the body or the neck?" asked Bomba with a show of indifference.

"Now we know that the stranger boasts," broke in Tama. "If he hit the body, he will do well."

"It will be the neck," declared Bomba.

The arrow sang through the air and the buzzard fell, transfixed by the arrow lodged in its neck.

Again there was an outburst of excited exclamations. The natives had never seen such shooting.

"That is but little," said Bomba, satisfied with the impression he had produced. "Bomba has a fire stick in his pouch that speaks with the voice of thunder, and when it speaks something dies. But he will not show it now."

The Indians looked at him with awe. Gone was the half contempt with which they had at first regarded him. No such boy had ever been seen in those parts before. In their superstitious minds was the vague, confused impression that perhaps he was one of the gods.

"Bomba would see Japazy," went on the lad. "He has come from a far country to speak with him. Perhaps the warriors of his tribe will show Bomba where the chief dwells?"

They looked at each other questioningly.

"He is a bold man who would speak with Japazy," said Abino. "Japazy does not like strangers. Some have been cast on the island from the river, and they have never gone back to speak of the island of the big cats. They have gone to the place of the dead."

This had not an auspicious sound, and Bomba for a moment felt an uncomfortable chill creeping up his spine.

"Bomba has no evil thought in his mind," the lad rejoined. "He does not seek any of Japazy's goods, and he will not say anything that will bring harm to Japazy or his people. He would only ask a question of Japazy."

His hearers still looked extremely dubious, and Bomba thought that he could detect pity in some of the glances directed toward him.

"It is not for Japazy's people to know what is in the mind of their chief," said Abino. "Japazy does as he wills and his words mean life or death."

"He will speak life for Bomba," replied the lad, with an assumption of confidence that he was a long way from feeling. "Will Japazy's fighting men take Bomba to their chief?"

They drew apart and conferred together. It was evident that even this simple request required thought before it could be granted. Bomba could see that, if Japazy resented his coming, his wrath might fall upon those who had brought the unwelcome stranger to his presence instead of killing him on the spot.

There was an animated discussion that at times almost reached the dimensions of a quarrel. But at last they came to a conclusion and Abino turned toward Bomba.

"The stranger shall go to Japazy," he announced. "But he must have his hands bound so that he may do no harm to Japazy or his people."

Bomba took a step backward.

"Bomba is free," he said proudly. "It is not meet that he have his hands bound as though he were a slave. His hands will do no hurt to Japazy or the people of his tribe. Bomba's heart is good. Has he not said that he came in peace? May the curse of the gods rest on Bomba, if he means harm."

His earnestness seemed to make an impression, but still the tribesmen hesitated.

"The stranger then must give up his bow and his knife and the fire stick that speaks with the voice of thunder," suggested Abino, as a compromise.

But Bomba shook his head.

"The bow, the knife and the fire stick are Bomba's friends," he declared. "Without them he would be like a man without arms and legs. They will do harm to no one but the wicked. Bomba will keep his friends."

They could have fallen upon him and overpowered him by sheer weight of numbers. But they had seen a demonstration of his skill and knew that he would take toll of some of them before he succumbed. Any one who could shoot a buzzard through the neck at two hundred feet

and sling a jaguar over his shoulders, was to be treated with respect. And doubtless the mention of the fire stick that spoke with the voice of thunder had been extremely potent.

Again there was a discussion and again the Indians yielded the point in question.

"It shall be as the stranger wills," announced Abino. "The warriors of Japazy will skin the jaguar and take its meat and then they will lead the stranger to the place where Japazy dwells."

"It is well," said Bomba, with more relief than he allowed to appear. "The men of Japazy have good hearts."

The men set to work on the jaguar, and Bomba helped them. The dexterity and sureness with which he wielded his knife contributed still further to the respect the Indians had conceived for him.

When the work was finished the men lifted up their respective burdens and led the way, with Bomba bringing up the rear. He did not think that any treachery was intended, for Abino, somehow, had given him an impression of sincerity. But he was on the alert and ready for instant action at any suspicious movement, for his life in the jungle had taught him to take no chances.

Nothing untoward developed, however, and before long they came to the straggling outskirts of a village that seemed to have a considerable

population. From every hut, as the little procession moved along, people poured out with exclamations of curiosity as they stared at the stranger who should have been a captive and yet walked behind the rest more with the air of a conqueror.

Most of the houses were of the usual native cabin type, but in the center of the town was a building of so much greater pretensions that Bomba concluded it must be the dwelling of Japazy.

Abino led Bomba to a little cabin not far from the palace, if it could be dignified by that name, and left him there with the promise that he would see Japazy and return.

He did return in less than five minutes.

"Japazy is gone!" he declared abruptly.

CHAPTER XX

DAZZLING TREASURE

SOMETHING like a stab pierced Bomba's heart when he heard Abino make the announcement that Japazy was gone.

"Gone?" he cried, springing to his feet. "Japazy gone? Has Bomba come so far through the jungle only to find that Japazy is not on the island of the big cats? Where has he gone? When will he be back?"

"Abino does not know," was the answer. "Japazy goes when and where he will. He does not ask counsel of the elders of the tribe. It is enough that he wants to go. But he does not stay away long. The stranger will have to wait."

"Has he gone away from Jaguar Island, or is he going about among his people in the other villages?" asked Bomba.

"There is no village but this," replied Abino. "Once there were many on the island, but the big cats have come and killed so many of the people that they have all come together in this place so that they will be safe. The big cats do not come

where they are so many fighting men. No, Japazy is not on the island. He has gone away over the water."

The sunken city of which Hondura had spoken came into Bomba's mind.

"Is it that he has gone to the place where stood the city that had towers of gold?" he asked.

A startling change came into Abino's tone and manner. His glance seemed to bore Bomba through and through.

"What foolish words are these that the stranger speaks?" he demanded sharply. "There is no city that has towers of gold. It is not well to ask too many questions. Men have asked questions of Japazy, and he has cut out their tongues. If the stranger is wise, he will let others speak while he listens. Abino has spoken."

Bomba realized that he had touched upon a forbidden subject. For some reason, the sunken city was a secret that was jealously guarded. He resolved to be discreet.

"Abino speaks wise words," he said placatingly. "Bomba will keep them in his heart. He will wait in patience till Japazy returns."

"That is well," returned Abino, mollified. Bomba shall have food and drink and none shall harm him. And he shall have a place to sleep in the house of Japazy until the chief comes back from his journey. Bomba can come now and

Abino will take him to the place where he shall stay."

Bomba rose and followed his guide. His appearance outside was again the signal for an outpouring of the curious. There had been time now for the warriors who had first met this stranger to spread abroad the story of his strength and skill, and there was manifest respect in the fact that, while they followed him, they were careful not to come too close. Who of them knew but that this youth who boasted of a fire stick that spoke like thunder might be a god?

Under other circumstances Bomba's pride would have been gratified by this tribute. But his whole thought was centered now on the disappearance of Japazy. This had not entered into his calculations. He bitterly regretted that he had not come sooner. Suppose Japazy never came back? Life was a precarious thing in this part of the world. Usually it hung by a thread. The bite of a snake, the spring of a jaguar, and Japazy's lips might be sealed forever. Then Bomba's last hope of learning the secret of his parentage would have vanished.

The crowd halted at the entrance to Japazy's great dwelling. Evidently it was forbidden ground except to the chosen few, such as Abino, who, as Bomba learned later, was Japazy's chief counselor and who had charge of all matters per-

taining to the tribe during his master's absence.

Followed by Bomba alone, Abino led the way through a massive door, well furnished with bars and bolts to protect its owner in case of invasion or revolt. And once inside, Bomba saw a sight that fairly dazzled him.

He had never been in any house but a native hut, with its rude and scanty furniture. He had expected to see something more elaborate in the dwelling of Japazy. But he was by no means prepared for the splendor that burst upon him.

There were objects here that might have graced any palace in Europe. Beautiful paintings hung on the walls. Sumptuous rugs covered the floors. Splendid chairs and divans were scattered here and there. Silken tapestries hung as portières at the entrances of various rooms that opened from the main hall. There were statues of marble, tables cunningly carved and inlaid with gold and precious stones, curious medallions and intaglios, suits of armor and swords of the finest steel, a vast number of objects of art of all kinds scattered about in profusion.

Bomba had never seen anything of the kind, never dreamed of them, never known that they existed. It was as though he had been translated to another world.

Where had these things come from? How had they been secured?

Then light flashed upon Bomba. They must have come from that city of which Hondura had spoken, the city whose very towers had been of gold! Somehow, Japazy had found access to that city—or what was left of it. No wonder that he guarded his secret so jealously!

Bomba had no knowledge of values. He had never seen money. But he knew vaguely that here was something infinitely precious, infinitely desirable. And the white blood in him, with its inheritance of taste and culture and love of the beautiful, as well as the little knowledge of wider things that Casson, before that devastating gun explosion, had given him, told him that he was in a treasure house.

Were things like these, he asked himself, the things that white people had in the homes and cities that Frank Parkhurst had told him about? Were they things that he, Bomba, might have, if he were living with the race to which he belonged?

He stole a glance at Abino. The savage was standing there stolidly, indifferently, in a bored attitude. Bomba sensed that the man had not the slightest appreciation of the beauty by which he was surrounded. He had the soul of a native of the jungle, incapable of being touched by anything but the most primitive needs of life.

But why should Japazy then appreciate and

collect them? The explanation dawned on Bomba. Japazy was a half-breed. Some of his blood was white. And Sobrinini had known Japazy when they were both parts of that faraway country where the white people dwelt. So Japazy had learned what beauty was, and the part of him that was white had yearned for these things! He had gathered them from the sunken city, where once a great civilization had flourished, and had furnished his dwelling with the splendor of the distant white civilization.

Bomba felt an increased respect for the chief he had come to see. Part of the blood, anyway, of this man was white. And were not all white men brothers? Would not Japazy feel a touch of kinship and give him freely the information that he sought?

It never occurred to Bomba that in giving Japazy credit for taste and a love of beauty for its own sake he might be paying too high a tribute to the half-breed. That the latter should be collecting these things for mercenary purposes with the design, when he should have enough, of shipping them overseas and selling them at fabulous prices, and then following them to live for the rest of his life in wealth and luxury amid the civilization whose value he knew, did not enter Bomba's mind.

In the center of the largest room stood a plat-

form covered with a cloth of scarlet and gold, and on this was a great carved chair that doubtless served Japazy as a throne. Bomba could figure the half-breed sitting there, stern and commanding, clothed in gorgeous raiment the better to emphasize the distance between him and his dependents who bowed cringingly before him.

Abino seemed to realize what Bomba was thinking, and he answered the unspoken question.

"It is from here that Japazy rules his people," said Abino in tones of reverence. "Here he speaks the words that mean life or death. It is here that the stranger will stand when he is brought in to where Japazy waits to hear him."

Words that mean life or death! Which of the two would they mean to him, Bomba wondered.

"Come," said Abino, "and Abino will show you the place where you are to stay."

He led him to a room at some distance from that large central hall and motioned him to enter.

In contrast to the other room, it was very simply and plainly furnished. Still, it was in the style of the white people, with chairs and table, a rug on the floor and a bed with a mattress, sheets and coverings.

Bomba felt strange and abashed. He had never sat on a chair, never slept in a bed. But he restrained his feelings in the presence of Abino. After all, he was white, and his heart swelled at

the thought. This would be his chance to do as white folks did, sit on a chair, sleep in a bed, try to imagine by so doing that he was getting a little closer to his own people for whom his heart yearned. When he did find them he did not want to have them ashamed of him.

"It is in this room that people stay who come from afar to have talk with Japazy," Abino remarked. "Some of them, after he has heard their words, go away again. But some do not go away."

The last words had an ominous ring and were not calculated to add to Bomba's peace of mind. But he gave no sign, and a look of admiration that the native could not repress came into Abino's eyes.

"The stranger is brave," he said. "His arms are strong and his eye is straight. Abino does not forget how the stranger slung the jaguar over his shoulder and how he shot his arrow through the neck of the buzzard on the top of the tall tree. But it is not enough for one who stands before Japazy to have strong arms and a straight eye. He must have a heart that does not tremble."

"Is Japazy then so terrible?" asked Bomba.

"The stranger shall see for himself," answered Abino. "Japazy's eyes shoot lightnings. His voice is like the thunder. No arrow can pierce

him, no knife can bite him. For he has ghosts and demons that obey his words. They turn aside the arrows. They dull the edge of the knife. But it is not well to talk of Japazy. The stranger will rest here and Abino will send him food. Then, after he has eaten, the elders of the tribe will come and talk with him."

"They are good words that Abino speaks," answered the lad. "Bomba will be glad to talk to the elders of the tribe and tell them why he has come to Jaguar Island."

Abino withdrew, and Bomba welcomed the chance to be alone. He had been under a terrific strain, mentally and physically. Now he could relax for a while before he had to brace himself again for the interview that was coming.

His eyes, glancing around the room, caught sight of a picture on the wall. At the sight his heart almost leaped from his body.

The pictured face of the portrait was that of the same lovely woman who had looked down at him from the portrait in the dwelling of Sobrinini!

CHAPTER XXI

THE DEEPENING MYSTERY

With one bound Bomba was across the room and looking at the picture with all his soul in his eyes.

Yes, it was the same beautiful face, girlish and appealing, the soft hair waving back from the broad forehead, the half-smiling lips, the eyes that were dark and melting. And the eyes looked down at him now as they had looked at him in the hut of Sobrinini, full of love and tenderness, while the lips seemed ready to murmur words of endearment.

What chords of memory did that face stir in Bomba's heart? What recollections, faint and dim as some far off strains of music, were tugging at his consciousness? What vague memory told that desolate lad that he was looking at the pictured face of his mother?

His mother! The mother who perhaps had sung to him the lullaby that Sobrinini had crooned, who once perhaps had caressed him, kissed him, called him Bonny, her Bonny!

A passion of tears welled to the boy's eyes. His heart was stirred to its depths.

But he dashed the tears away. A native might enter at any minute and might attribute them to weakness, to fear at the situation in which he found himself. Above everything, he must remain master of himself.

How came that picture in the dwelling of Japazy, the half-breed? Why had a similar picture been in the hut of Sobrinini? What mysterious link was there between the lovely original of that picture and Sobrinini, the witch woman, Japazy, the master of Jaguar Island, Jojasta, the medicine man of the Moving Mountain, and Casson, his friend and former protector? Somewhere, some time, those residents of the Amazonian jungle had known the mysterious Bartow, his wife, Laura, and perhaps the little child named Bonny. How had fate brought them together? And how had fate torn them apart?

The door of his room opened, and a boy appeared, bringing a tray of food. It was savory and abundant, and Bomba ate it with a relish.

The boy, who seemed to be about twelve years old, stood by, watching him with black, beadlike eyes. Curiosity was in the eyes and awe, awe of this bold stranger, only a little older than himself in years, but vastly older in strength and experience, who had dared to take his life in his

hands and come to ask questions of the dreaded Japazy, the lord of life and death on Jaguar Island.

"What is your name?" asked Bomba, who took a liking to the youngster.

"Thy servant's name is Solani," answered the boy. "He is the son of Abino."

"Solani has a good father," said Bomba diplomatically.

"Yes," answered the boy proudly. "There is no one so wise on the island of the big cats as Abino, except Japazy himself."

"Has Solani ever seen ghosts or demons?" asked Bomba. "It is said that there are many on the island."

The boy looked about fearfully.

"There are many here," he answered. "They keep Japazy from harm. But no one can see them except Japazy. His eyes see everything."

"Bomba saw some lights on the river," said the jungle boy, determined to draw Solani out, for he saw that he was in a responsive mood. "Bomba did not know but what the lights were the campfires of the ghosts."

"The lights are burning brushwood," explained Solani. "They are thrown out from the earth when Tamura, the mountain, is angry and his anger breaks great holes in the ground."

"Is Tamura often angry?" asked Bomba.

"Many times he speaks in thunder and throws out rocks and rivers of fire that eat up whatever they touch," replied Solani. "Tamura has killed many of our people. The old men say that he will not be silent until some stranger is offered up to him. Then he will be satisfied and make no more thunder."

As Bomba, as far as he knew, was the only stranger at that time on the island, there was something decidedly uncomfortable in this information.

At this moment Abino entered, followed by several old men whom Bomba took to be the chief advisers of the tribe.

Abino motioned to his son to take away the empty dishes and what food remained, and then he and his companions squatted on their haunches in a semicircle and gazed fixedly at Bomba.

They said nothing, and their stare persisted so long that Bomba became restless and himself broke the silence.

"It was good of Abino to send Bomba food," he said. "There was much food and it was good."

"The stranger must not starve until Japazy hears what words the stranger has to say to him," replied Abino.

"They will not be many words," replied Bomba. "They will not make Japazy shoot lightnings

from his eyes. Bomba comes in peace and his words are good words."

"What are the words that the stranger would speak with Japazy?" asked one of the most aged and wizened of his visitors.

Bomba hesitated. Would Japazy resent his confiding his mission to any one but himself?

On the other hand, he had already gotten some useful information from Solani. The mention of human sacrifices, for instance, had put him on his guard, if, in the future, any such thing should be attempted. Perhaps in conversation with these elders of the tribe he might learn something else that might be of value to him.

Moreover they had asked him the question, and any lack of frankness on his part might deepen the suspicion they already entertained as to his motives.

He decided to answer.

"Bomba would ask Japazy who are the father and mother of Bomba and how he can find them if they are still alive," the lad stated.

Bomba caught the quick glances that passed between the Indians at this announcement, and he was not unaware of the look that Abino flashed at the picture of the lovely woman on the wall.

"Why does the stranger think that Japazy can tell him who his father and mother are?" asked Abino, after a pause.

"Sobrinini told Bomba that Japazy knew," returned Bomba.

"Sobrinini!" exclaimed one of his auditors. "She is the witch woman who dwells on the island of snakes. To go to that island is death. How, then, does the stranger say that he has had speech with Sobrinini?"

"Bomba's tongue is not forked," replied the lad. "Bomba went to the island of snakes and had speech with the witch woman. Then he took her away from the island and gave her shelter in the hut of Bomba and the good white man, Casson."

"Why did not Sobrinini tell the stranger of his father and mother?" asked his questioner incredulously.

"Sobrinini tried to tell, but the gods had put clouds on her mind and she could not see through them," answered Bomba. "But she could see Japazy through the clouds and she said he would know. So Bomba is here."

The promptness and sincerity of his answers evidently had some effect on his visitors. They looked at each other uncertainly. Then the eldest of them spoke.

"There is much gold on the island of the big cats," he said slowly. "Strangers have come here before, and their words were as smooth as the skin of the baby and as sweet as honey in the

comb. But they said one thing with their tongue and another in their heart. The demons that guard Japazy told him what word was in the stranger's heart; and that word was gold. The strangers did not go away again from the island of the big cats."

"Bomba has not two ways of speaking," answered the lad. "The words from his lips are the same as the words in his heart. Bomba does not care for the gold of Japazy. He would not know what to do with it if Japazy gave it to him. May the gods lay their curse on Bomba if he is not speaking from a clean heart!"

Another long pause ensued.

"Is it true that the stranger does not even know the name of his father or that of his mother?" asked one of the group.

"Bomba does not surely know," returned the lad. "But when Sobrinini saw Bomba she called him Bartow. And Jojasta of the Moving Mountain called him Bartow. They thought Bomba was Bartow or Bartow's ghost. So if Bomba looked so much like Bartow, it may be that Bartow was Bomba's father. And Sobrinini spoke of Laura. And Casson spoke of Laura. It is in Bomba's heart that that may have been the name of his mother."

Was it fancy, or did Abino again steal a glance at that picture on the wall?

"It is well," said the oldest of the group as he rose to his feet, an example followed by the others. "We will think over what the stranger has said."

The old men went out of the room silently, in single file. But the silence persisted only until they had gone some distance down the corridor that led to the large hall. Then they broke out into excited speech.

Bomba would have given a great deal to know what they were saying, but they were too far away for him to hear them distinctly.

After they had gone out of the door of the building, however, their way led them under his window. They were still talking excitedly, and, as he strained his ears, these words floated up to him:

"Bartow! Was not that the name of the man Japazy killed?"

CHAPTER XXII

THE CREEPING DEATH

BOMBA, his head in a whirl, staggered back from the window when he heard the sinister words:

"Was not that the name of the man Japazy killed?"

Was it possible that the father whom he had sought so long was really dead? Had all his search been futile?

But the despair that this thought brought him was quickly swallowed up by another emotion. Rage, blinding rage, at the man who had killed his father, at Japazy, the half-breed, the arrogant, heartless monster who lorded it over this ignorant people.

If this should prove true—that Japazy was really his father's murderer—Bomba then and there vowed vengeance. Let Japazy look to himself! Let him gather all his ghosts and demons to protect him! They would be of no avail. Bomba's arrow or Bomba's knife would find the

black heart of the half-breed! His father's murder should be avenged!

Bomba knew nothing of the Christian law of forgiveness. He had been brought up in the jungle, whose first law was self-preservation, whose second law was vengeance for evil received. If Japazy had taken Bartow's life, Japazy's life must pay the forfeit.

Oh, if Japazy were only here! Oh, if Bomba could meet him face to face and wrest the truth from him! The lad paced the room, gnashing his teeth with impatience.

His restless pacings brought him beneath the lovely pictured face on the wall. He gazed at it yearningly. If she were his mother, perhaps she still lived, even if his father was dead.

Then another thought came to him and his rage flamed up anew. Perhaps she, too, had fallen a victim to Japazy. The hand that slew the one might also have slain the other. In that case, Bomba would owe a double debt of vengeance. And he would pay that debt!

Oh, if he only knew!

But there was nothing he could do until Japazy returned.

Suppose, however, that Japazy did not return? What if any one of the thousand perils of the jungle should cut short his life? Then perhaps Bomba could never get the knowledge for which

his soul panted. He would be cheated, too, of his vengeance—supposing it were true that Japazy had indeed slain his father.

Even while immersed in these gloomy reflections, a gleam of hope came to Bomba.

Abino!

Perhaps Abino knew. He was the chosen counselor of Japazy as far as that haughty despot permitted any one to advise him. Perhaps he was also the repository of Japazy's secrets. Those quick and furtive glances that Abino had cast at the picture on the wall! What did they mean? What did Abino know?

Tired out finally by these ponderings and questionings, Bomba at last threw himself on the floor and slept. And for this he chose a place directly beneath the picture, where those lovely, tender eyes could look down upon him.

It was dark when he woke, and the immediate occasion of his waking was the entrance of Solani, bringing his supper.

The boy lighted a torch and thrust it into a holder against the wall. By its light, Bomba noted that the boy looked disturbed and frightened.

"Solani is sad to-night," observed Bomba, as he prepared to eat the meal that the lad had set on the table. "What is it that makes the heart of Solani heavy?"

The boy looked about him carefully, and when he answered, it was almost in a whisper.

"Solani grieves because he fears that harm may come to the stranger," he replied.

"Who would bring harm to Bomba, except perhaps Japazy?" asked the jungle lad. "And Japazy is not here. Unless Japazy has come since you brought the last meat to Bomba," he added.

"Japazy is not here," replied Solani. "But the people of the tribe are fearful of his wrath if he should come and find the stranger here. They think that Japazy will not be glad to hear the stranger's words about his father and his mother. They fear that Japazy may be angry because they did not kill the stranger as soon as he landed on Jaguar Island."

Bomba's heart sank. Was it possible that the elders, believing that Japazy had killed the boy's father, were fearful that he had come to take vengeance on their chief?

To be sure, he was only a boy, but he had that very day demonstrated that he had strength, skill, and courage that any warrior of the tribe would have found it hard to match.

"It cannot be that the elders of the tribe would do harm to a stranger who came with his palms out and put himself into their keeping," said Bomba. "That would bring on the people the wrath of the gods."

"They do not fear the wrath of the gods as much as they fear the wrath of Japazy," returned Solani. "The gods are very far away. Japazy is near."

No better proof than this statement, simply made, could have been afforded of the tremendous power exercised by the crafty half-breed over the superstitious people through the strength of his personality and his talk of ghosts and demons.

"What do the elders of the tribe say about Bomba?" questioned the jungle lad, with an assumption of carelessness that he was far from feeling.

"They meet to-night to take counsel," answered Solani. "Then it will be known what they think about the stranger and what they will do with him."

"Where do they meet?" asked Bomba, who was already forming a plan of action.

"In the house of Abino, my father," was the answer.

"Is that the house where Bomba was taken before he was brought to the house of Japazy?" Bomba further queried.

"Yes," replied Solani.

"It is well," said Bomba. "Their words will be good words and they will do no harm to the stranger that came to them in peace."

Solani looked very doubtful as to that, but he said no more, and Bomba himself did not prolong the conversation. He was too busy with his thoughts.

He could readily understand that, in order to curry favor with the tyrant, they might make a sacrifice of Bomba. It was for him to forestall this, if possible, and to learn their plans before they were put into execution.

"Has the stranger ever seen a cooanaradi?" asked Solani unexpectedly, as he started to gather up the dishes and the remnants of food.

"Yes, Bomba has seen them and slain them," answered the jungle boy. "They are the most wicked snakes of the jungle. Why does Solani ask?"

But Solani acted as though he had already said too much and did not reply. He hastily finished his task and disappeared. But as he went out of the door he turned and looked once more at Bomba with a long, lingering glance as though he never expected to see him again.

The look made Bomba uneasy. What did Solani know that he had been afraid to say? That he meant to warn him to be on his guard was evident. Probably even in going that far the native lad had done what he had been forbidden to do.

Bomba waited until it was fully dark. It was

then within an hour of moonrise, and darkness was needed for the plan that he had in mind.

He went stealthily through the house, examining every room by the light of the torch he had plucked from the wall. He thought that perhaps some sentries were on guard to watch his movements. But the dwelling appeared to be deserted. It had probably been decided that any one who had braved so many perils in coming to Jaguar Island would not be inclined to leave it before his mission had been accomplished.

Having ascertained to his satisfaction that no one was lurking in the shadows, he went back to his room and carefully examined his weapons. Having found that they were in perfect order, he extinguished the torch, after one last loving look at the pictured face upon the wall, and slipped out of the house like a shadow.

There was scarcely any one abroad. Doubtless the fear that a jaguar might be lurking about kept the inhabitants indoors after dark. Even if Bomba should be met by any one, the probability was that in the darkness he would pass as one of their own people.

With the keen observation that had been sharpened by his experience of the jungle, he had carefully noted the location of Abino's house and now had no difficulty in finding it.

A flickering light from the torches within shone

through the open windows. Avoiding the part that fronted on the straggling street, Bomba glided round to the back of the house and crouched under one of the openings that served as windows. That the conference was already in session was evident from the hum of conversation that came to the unseen listener.

The first word that Bomba could distinguish was the last that he had heard from the lips of Solani, "cooanaradi." The coincidence sent a shiver through his veins. That word of evil omen, the word that stood for the fiercest and deadliest snake in the Amazonian jungle! What significance did it have in a conversation that presumably concerned itself with Bomba?

The house was made of rough logs with many crevices. Applying his eyes to one of these, Bomba could see what was going on in the room without the risk of discovery that would be involved in lifting his head above the window sill.

In the room were gathered the same elders with whom he had talked in the afternoon. To their number had been added the warriors, Sunka and Boshot, who had slain the jaguar in the morning.

An expression of deep perplexity was visible on all the dark faces. It was plain that the problem with which they had to deal was giving them a great deal of concern.

Bomba listened intently, trying not to lose a syllable. Abino was speaking.

"It is certain that Japazy will not wish to see the stranger," he said. "Who would wish to see the son of the man he had killed?"

"Is it known to Abino that Japazy killed the stranger's father?" asked Boshot.

"Japazy has not told it to Abino," was the answer. "But when Japazy has taken too much intoxicating drink he has talked sometimes to himself and Abino's ears have been open to his words. The stranger thinks his father's name was Bartow. When Japazy's speech has been thick he has spoken the name of Bartow and made motions with his knife. Then he has said, 'Bartow is dead.' Then Japazy has smiled as if he were glad."

"Did Japazy kill the stranger's mother, too?" asked Sunka.

"Abino does not know," the native replied. "Japazy has not spoken of that. But many times he has gone to look at the woman's face on the wall, and when he turned away Japazy's face was not good to see."

"It may be that Japazy has questions he would ask of the stranger, as well as hear the stranger's questions," put in one of the elders. "Japazy may be angry if he comes back and finds the stranger dead so that he may not speak with him."

"He need not know that the stranger has been here," observed another of the group. "We can put the people under silence so that they will not speak of his coming."

"That would be better than to have the stranger kill Japazy," remarked the eldest of the company. "The stranger speaks smooth words, but who knows what black thoughts are in his heart? And if he wounds but does not kill Japazy, what will Japazy do to us because we did not kill the stranger when he came among us?"

That this consideration had weight was evident from the grave expression of his hearers.

At this moment there was a terrific roar from the volcano and the earth shook so violently under Bomba's feet that he was thrown headlong. For several minutes the quake continued and then gradually subsided.

When Bomba peered again through the crevice he could note consternation on all faces.

"Tamura is angry," declared Abino solemnly. "To-day he has been more angry than for many moons. Why is that? It is because to-day the stranger came. He does not like the stranger. He wants that he should die. Tamura has spoken."

A chill went through Bomba's veins. It had been very unlucky for him that the convulsion should have come at the very moment that they

were debating his fate. Now, as he looked from face to face, he could read his doom. To their minds the god of the mountain had spoken, and it only remained for them to bow to the decree.

There were whispers now, as though what they were discussing was too horrid to be spoken of aloud. Strain his ears as he might, Bomba could catch but a single sentence:

"He shall die by the creeping death!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE FIRE STICK SPEAKS

WITH the utterance of their ominous words the elderly natives rose to their feet, and it was evident that the meeting was about to break up.

It would never do to be caught lurking there, and Bomba was off like a flash. The darkness had swallowed him up before any of the group had come through the door.

Gliding along as silently as a ghost, he reached the dwelling of Japazy. There was no sign of any one having been there in his absence. Everything was as he had left it, and a deathlike silence wrapped the house like a garment.

Reaching his room he threw himself on the bed to think. And if he ever needed to think swiftly and think wisely, it was then.

Now he knew why Solani had looked at him so sadly and lingeringly, as one looks on the face of the dead. The native boy had already sensed the turn that things were taking and felt that in fact, if not in words, the stranger's death had been already decreed.

But sometimes there is a long way between a decree and its execution, and Bomba, despite the awful peril in which he stood, was by no means ready to concede that he was as good as dead. Again and again he had faced death and escaped by a hair's breadth. And the quick wit and indomitable daring that had saved him then were his now.

He rapidly reviewed the possibilities in the case. Two courses of action seemed open to him. He could attempt to escape, to leave this terrible island, cross the river and reach the mainland, where he would be safe. Or he could stay and face the enemies who were determined upon his death and try in some way to defeat their purpose.

But if he adopted the first course, that would be an end to his chance of finding speech with Japazy. It would be putting aside his last chance to get some knowledge of his parents, of answering the questions that for months past had tormented him.

The second course, Bomba had to admit to himself, was so foolhardy as almost to smack of insanity. What chance would he have to make head against the warriors of the tribe if it came to a battle? He could doubtless kill some of them, but in the end they would overwhelm him by sheer force of numbers.

But was there not a third course that offered some chance of success? Suppose he did indeed leave the village of Japazy, but still remain on the island?

He felt sure that Japazy had gone to the sunken city with the towers of gold. Doubtless that was his treasure house, to which he had managed in some way to find access and to which he went from time to time to gather more riches. Only in that way could the priceless objects already in this house be accounted for.

But if he had gone there, he had gone by the river and would have to return in the same way. Bomba knew from the description of Hondura the general direction of the sunken city. It lay to the north. Why might not Bomba lurk about the river bank to the north and descry Japazy's coming? Then he could boldly make himself known and get the interview that he had come so far to seek.

While he was immersed in these thoughts he became conscious of a slight rustling. It was so slight that none but a trained ear like that of Bomba's would have detected it at all.

But he heard it and was about to leap from the bed to investigate, when he suddenly stiffened and lay as though carved from stone. For in a beam of moonlight that filtered through the window he had caught sight of what looked like a long

black rope dragging itself over the sill of the door.

But the long black rope was alive!

Bomba knew what it was, knew even before he saw the glint of the evil eyes in the wicked head. It was a cooanaradi, the most deadly and terrible snake of the South American jungle, a species that sometimes grows to twelve feet in length, is noted for its ferocity and speed and its eagerness to attack man even when retreat is possible. And its bite means certain death.

A cold sweat broke over Bomba. He did not dare move a muscle.

A cooanaradi! Now Bomba knew what Solani had meant. Now he fathomed the meaning of that ominous phrase he had heard at the conference of the elders:

"He shall die by the creeping death!"

The captive reptile had been brought to the house and silently released. The Indians knew that it would find its way to Bomba's room by the smell of the food that had twice been served in it. Once in the room with Bomba, the cooanaradi could be trusted to do the rest.

The infernal cunning of the scheme came to Bomba like a flash. If Japazy on his return should be vexed at not having spoken with Bomba, the natives could point out that they were not responsible—that the snake in some way had

found its way into the house and killed the lad. That would clear them from blame.

If, on the other hand, Japazy should be relieved at finding the boy dead, the perpetrators could proudly boast their part in the deed and count on the gratitude and perhaps the gifts of the master.

There was a horrid, slithering sound as the scaly body was dragged over the floor. The deathlike stillness in which Bomba lay had thus far prevented his detection. Luckily the bed lay in the shadow.

The moonlight came into the room at an angle, and it was intercepted by the branches of a tree outside so that its beams were cast only at intervals here and there. It was only when the rays caught the long, black body that Bomba was able to follow the course of the reptile about the room. At other times he had to guess its location by the horrid rustling that accompanied its progress.

There was a possible chance, Bomba thought, that the snake, not finding the food it sought, would curl up after a while and go to sleep. But this hope was dissipated as he caught a glimpse of the evil eyes that were darting in every direction. Nothing was further from that messenger of evil than sleep.

It was only a matter of time when the reptile would reach the bed. Then the head would be

upreared. It was beyond possibility that it would not detect the lad lying there, no matter how still he kept.

Then would come a dart like lightning and the terrible fangs, dripping with poison, would be imbedded in the boy's face or throat, and a very few minutes later Bomba would be dead.

His weapons? The bow and arrow were out of the question. Long before he could string his arrow the snake would be upon him. The knife? That might serve at close quarters, but that meant he would be bitten first.

The fire stick!

Slowly, imperceptibly, Bomba's right hand stole to his pouch. It gripped the butt of the revolver. Quite as slowly his hand came back holding the weapon.

The slithering grew more distinct. The monster was drawing nearer.

There was a moment's pause. Then a long rope seemed to rise from the floor and Bomba found himself looking into the eyes of the cooanaradi.

The fire stick spoke!

CHAPTER XXIV

THE VOLCANO'S ROAR

SIMULTANEOUSLY with the crack of the revolver Bomba threw himself from the further side of the bed to the floor.

There was a terrible thrashing about of the reptile's body, and Bomba knew that it had been hit. But whether it was mortally or only slightly wounded he could not tell.

He held the revolver in readiness for a second shot, fearing every moment to see that dreadful head reappear.

But no second shot was necessary. A few more moments and the convulsive movements ceased.

The cooanaradi was dead!

With infinite caution Bomba tiptoed to the other side of the bed. Now there was no doubt. The reptile's head was practically gone, shattered into fragments by that first shot.

Bomba slumped down on the bed, hardly able to believe in his good fortune. He caressed the revolver lovingly and slipped in another cartridge to take the place of the one that had done such good service.

He had scarcely had time to collect his scattered thoughts before there was a noise outside as of people running. He looked out of the window and saw a number of shadowy forms, thrown into relief by the torches that they carried.

Some of the foremost halted under the window and Bomba could recognize Abino, Sunka, and Boshot, besides a couple of the elders who had been at the conference.

They had reached there so quickly following the shot that Bomba felt sure that they had been lurking in the vicinity, waiting for the cooanaradi to get in its deadly work.

Bomba smiled grimly to himself as he noted that they stopped at the window. He well knew why. Not one of them cared to come into a house in which they believed a cooanaradi was wandering around.

Then, like a flash, the thought came to him that he might turn what threatened to be a calamity into a blessing. Why should not the dead serpent prove a protector, a guardian of the dwelling? As long as they believed it was at large not one would risk stepping foot inside the door.

With this belief on the part of the Indians to aid him, Bomba might be able to hold the place until Japazy returned. At any rate, he would be able to choose his own time for leaving.

There was a whispered consultation beneath the window and then Abino called:

"Is the stranger still awake?"

Bomba waited for a moment and then leaned out of the window.

"He is awake. Does Abino want to speak words with him? Bomba's ears are open."

"Abino and the elders heard a great noise, and they feared that harm had come to the stranger," the native returned. "They have come to help him, if he is in trouble."

To help him! The men who had sent the serpent to strike him down!

Bomba's blood boiled. But he restrained himself with an effort, and his tone was silken as he replied:

"It is good of Abino and the elders to want to help Bomba. But he is not in trouble. But why do Abino and the elders stand beneath the window? Will they not come in and talk with Bomba?"

In the moonlight he could see the movement of horrified recoil at the suggestion, and again he smiled grimly to himself.

"The stranger needs sleep," replied Abino, after a momentary pause. "It is not well for us to talk with him when his eyes are heavy."

"Bomba is not tired, and he would be glad to speak words with Abino and the elders," re-

turned the lad. "He is lonely. There is none here for him to talk to except the cooanaradi."

There was a gasp of amazement.

"The cooanaradi!" came in a chorus from startled throats.

"Yes," replied Bomba, with an ostentatious yawn. "The cooanaradi came in to talk with Bomba. Bomba talked to him. Bomba knows how to talk with the cooanaradi. He will not hurt Bomba. Bomba has his hand on him now," and he reached down and touched the grisly coils. "He will not hurt any one who does not mean harm to Bomba."

A yell of fright came from the superstitious natives. What magic was this of which the stranger was master, this mysterious lad who spoke of the dreaded scourge of the jungle as though it were a cooing dove, who could place his hand upon it and still remain alive?

They turned to retreat in a flight of panic when Bomba's voice stayed them.

"Abino will send food to Bomba in the morning?" he inquired.

There was a moment's pause, and then Abino replied in a trembling voice:

"Abino would not dare have Solani come into the house where a cooanaradi is."

Bomba seemed to consider this.

"It is well," he replied. "Solani does not know

how to talk to the cooanaradi as Bomba does. But he can bring food beneath the window in a basket and Bomba will draw it up."

"Solani shall come," promised Abino.

Their figures melted away in the distance and Bomba chuckled as he turned away. His reputation as a wizard was made. They were as afraid of him as they were of death. Now he could rest in tranquillity of soul until Japazy returned. For the first time in his life a cooanaradi had proved a friend—an involuntary friend, to be sure, but none the less a friend.

Bomba threw himself on the bed and in a few minutes was fast asleep.

For hours he slept.

Then came a tremendous roar, a fearful explosion that sounded like the crack of doom!

Bomba sprang from his bed and rushed to the window.

The heavens were a glare of red, and the glare was fiercest over in the direction where Tamura lay.

CHAPTER XXV

THE ISLAND SINKS

FROM the crater of the volcano a great mass of flame and smoke belched toward the sky. At the peak rivers were forming, rivers of molten lava, which, even as Bomba looked, began to flow down the sides of the mountain in every direction.

The fearful explosions still continued, and with every one, that dreadful column of flame mounted higher and the rivers of redhot lava increased in volume. The earth was rocking in the throes of an earthquake.

While Bomba was still trying to gather his wits together and determine what he should do, the house of Japazy split apart. Half of it went down in a deafening crash, and the other half, in which Bomba's room was located, swayed crazily, threatening at every instant to fall to the ground.

Bomba slung his bow over his shoulder and rushed to the picture hanging on the wall. He took it down—even in that moment of frenzied haste he handled it reverently—and slipped the

cord by which it had been suspended about his neck, covering the picture under the puma skin that stretched across his breast.

If he were doomed to die in this terrible cataclysm, he would die with that picture next his heart!

He glanced down the corridor and saw that it was blocked with debris. His only exit was the window. Luckily, it was not more than twelve feet from the ground, and Bomba dropped down safely.

He was not a moment too soon, for he had barely got out of reach before the rest of the building fell. The dwelling of Japazy, that had witnessed nobody knew how many grim tragedies, was now in ruins.

In the dim dawn that was coming up in the eastern sky, Bomba could see that most of the other houses in the town had shared the same fate. People were rushing about in fright, men, women and children, fleeing they knew not where, their only thought to get away from the fiery rivers of lava that were now pouring down rapidly toward the doomed town.

The earth was opening in great rents, which sometimes widened and at other times snapped shut, engulfing houses, trees and sometimes hapless human beings, whose screams of terror were dreadful to hear.

Apart from these more spectacular demonstrations of the unchained forces of nature, there was a sense of gradual sinking that was sickening and ominous in the extreme.

No one paid any attention to Bomba, so engrossed was every one in trying to find a path to safety.

The lad sniffed the air as a pointer does to get his sense of direction. Then, when he knew that he was headed for the north end of the island, he plunged into the woods and went as straight as an arrow to his goal.

There was terrible need for haste, as the rivers of lava were now pouring into the woods, blasting into ashes whatever they touched. If one of those rivers intercepted his path, it would be impossible to cross it.

The air was like that from a furnace, and Bomba was drenched with sweat as he made his way through the jungle. Showers of hot ashes were falling all about him. Great forest trees lay athwart his path, hurled to the ground as though they had been saplings.

Over and over came those deafening roars that seemed to split his eardrums, and ever the rivers of lava swelled in volume. The hot blasts that came from them scorched his throat and lungs and seared his eyes. He felt as though he were moving in a nightmare.

Now he was not alone. On every side the jungle was full of fleeing animals and reptiles. There were hundreds of them, the jaguars which had given the island its name, boa constrictors, dragging their huge lengths through the brush, jararacas, cooanaradis.

They brushed against Bomba, bumped into him, but not one of them gave him the slightest attention. Every hostile and venomous instinct was swallowed up in panic, in the terror to escape. They did not know where they were going. They did not care. All they thought of was to get away from that roaring mountain, from those terrible rivers of fire that threatened to overwhelm them.

Unexpectedly Bomba found himself on the edge of the river, the same surging, turbulent stream that had brought him to Jaguar Island. He was surprised at this, as he had calculated that he had at least a mile further to go before he reached its banks.

And then he knew!

The river was creeping inland. It had already covered the ground to the width of a mile. The island was sinking!

With frantic haste Bomba gathered together three logs, tore some creepers from the trees and lashed the logs together. Even in the brief time it took him to do this the water had deepened until it was up to his neck.

He pulled himself up on the rude and fragile raft and committed himself to the river. Soon the logs were in the grip of the current where they tossed about so violently that Bomba could not keep his feet. He threw himself flat and with his hands through interstices of the logs held on for his life.

He had little fear this time of the caymans. They themselves would be cowering with terror at this phenomenon that was shaking the bed of the stream as well as the dry land above its level. They would make no hostile move. Even the jaguars, whose heads now dotted the stream everywhere, could swim to the mainland without any danger from an attack by the alligators.

The current carried the raft toward the further side of the river, and before long it struck heavily against a jutting point of land. With one spring Bomba landed on the point, and a moment later stood safe on the fringe of the jungle.

As he looked toward the island there came a stupendous crash that dwarfed everything that had preceded. Once more Tamura belched forth a great torrent of flame. Then the whole island sank out of sight and where it had been were only miles of widely tossing waters.

Bomba viewed the terrible spectacle with awe

and consternation. The island where he had hoped to learn so much no longer existed.

But he was safe! His life had been spared—and that counted for much.

Then another comforting thought came to him. The island of Japazy had sunk. But, as far as he knew, Japazy himself still lived. He would find the half-breed yet.

What fruit was borne by that determination will be seen in the next volumes of this series: "Bomba the Jungle Boy in the Abandoned City; or, A Treasure Ten Thousand Years Old."

"Japazy still lives," murmured Bomba to himself. "Bomba will seek him out."

He took reverently from beneath the puma skin the portrait of the lovely woman. Again those beautiful eyes looked into his.

"Mother," he whispered. "Mother!"

His eyes blurred. He pressed his lips to the picture and replaced it next his heart.

Then he struck into the jungle.

THE END

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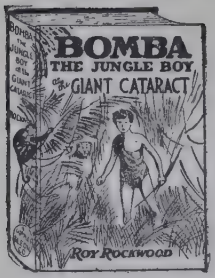

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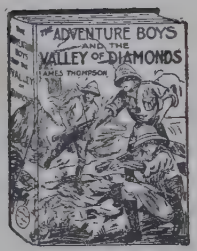

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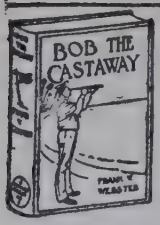

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